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No. I.

HALL'S CONTEMPLATIONS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. FIRST.

Engd by John Scott Glasgow

JOSEPH HALL, D.D.
BISHOP OF NORWICH
FROM THE ORIGINAL PAINTING IN EMANUEL COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE.

Published by Blackie & Son Glasgow

UNIV. OF MICH.

7192

CONTEMPLATIONS

220 H14

ON

THE HISTORICAL PASSAGES

OF THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

BY THE

RIGHT REV. JOSEPH HALL, D. D.

SUCCESSIVELY BISHOP OF EXETER AND NORWICH.

WITH AN ESSAY ON HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS,

BY THE

REV. RALPH WARDLAW, D. D.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

GLASGOW:
BLACKIE AND SON, 8, EAST CLYDE STREET,
AND 5, SOUTH COLLEGE STREET, EDINBURGH;
W. CURRY, JUN. & CO., DUBLIN; AND SIMPKIN & MARSHALL, LONDON.

MDCCCXXXIV.

Gift
Tappan Presb. Ass
3-1-1932

TO THE HIGH AND MIGHTY PRINCE,

HENRY, PRINCE OF WALES,

HIS HIGHNESS'S UNWORTHY SERVANT,

DEDICATES ALL HIS LABOURS, AND WISHES ALL HAPPINESS.

Most Gracious Prince:

This work of mine, which, if my hopes and desires fail me not, time may hereafter make great, I have presumed both to dedicate in whole to your Highness, and to parcel out in severals unto subordinate hands. It is no marvel if books have this freedom, when we ourselves can and ought to be all yours, while we are our own and others under you. I dare say, these meditations, how rude soever they may fall from my pen, in regard of their subject are fit for a prince. Here your Highness shall see how the great pattern of princes, the King of Heaven, hath ever ruled the world; how his substitutes, earthly kings, have ruled it under him, and with what success either of glory or ruin. Both your peace and war shall find here holy and great examples. And if history and observation be the best counsellors of your youth, what story can be so wise and faithful as that which God hath written for men, wherein you see both what hath been done, and what should be? What observation so worthy as that which is both raised from God, and directed to him? If the propriety which your Highness justly hath in the Work and Author, may draw your princely eyes and heart the rather to these holy speculations, your servant shall be happier in this favour than in all your outward bounty; as one to whom your spiritual progress deserves to be dearer than his own life; and whose daily suit is, that God would guide your steps aright in this slippery age, and continue to rejoice all good hearts in the view of your gracious proceedings.

Your Highness's humbly devoted servant,

JOSEPH HALL.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

In writing to Timothy, who had been trained by pious parents in the principles of Judaism, the apostle Paul says—2 Tim. iii. 16, 17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." —In these words, there are two things affirmed. The first is the *plenary inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures*. That these are the writings meant, would have been well enough understood by Timothy, even if the words we have quoted had stood alone; but it is further distinctly ascertained by the terms of the preceding verse—"and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."—The "holy writings" which Timothy had known, were, beyond controversy, the scriptures of the Old Testament,—those writings, of which the canonical authority was ascertained and settled in the Jewish Church, and which now form the first volume of our own Bibles. And whether we translate the sixteenth verse as above, according to our received English version, or—"Every writing, divinely inspired, is also profitable," &c. or even, "Every divinely inspired writing is profitable," &c.; the reference to the Jewish Scriptures is equally obvious, and the assertion of their inspiration equally clear. Unitarian translators and expositors, indeed, with their usual anxiety to free themselves of the inconvenient doctrine of plenary inspiration, in adopting a rendering which is equivalent to the last of the three just given, subjoin as a note—"Thus it is not defined what scripture was divinely inspired."* By which criticism, they make the apostle first refer Timothy to the holy writings in the knowledge of which he had been brought up, as "able to make him wise unto salvation;" and then, by a phrase of perfect ambiguity, insinuate a doubt whether they were all of divine authority, leaving him in entire uncertainty which were, and which were not; a phrase, indeed, which cannot be said to have affirmed the inspiration of any of them; but which simply asserts the general and insulated proposition (a truism which few certainly would think of disputing,) that "every divinely inspired writing is profitable" for the useful purposes enumerated!—"It is evident, that the apostle, in ver. 16, resumes distributively what he had before advanced collectively: so that "every writing divinely inspired" is a description by which the apostle designates *each and every one* of the writings comprised under the well understood collective denomination "*the holy writings*." Timothy, and every contemporary Jew or Christian, needed no explanation of this phrase. They knew it as one of the most common terms of usage, to denote the *writings*, or *scriptures*, to which the Lord Jesus was in the habit of referring as to the ultimate divine authority, the searching of which he enjoined, and which it is impossible to suppose, with any shadow of reason, that he did not design to use in the sense in which he knew that all his hearers would understand him; namely, as expressive of the whole sacred canon of the Jews; for "to them were intrusted the oracles of God." The general tenor of the New Testament most clearly recognises, under these descriptions, the whole *received* scriptures of the Jewish nation."*

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* See Improved version of the New Testament on the place.

The Old and New Testament Scriptures must stand or fall together. The authority of the New cannot be established, without the authority of the Old being inferentially established along with it, in precisely the same amount of certainty; and from the establishment of that of the Old, the same inference follows, although not exactly in the same way, in favour of the New. The inference from the New to the Old arises from the circumstance, that the former, in many explicit declarations, affirms the authority of the latter, and throughout proceeds upon the assumption of it;—the reciprocal inference from the Old to the New, is founded in the consideration, that the latter contains the fulfilment of the former; bearing to it the relation of the consummation to the introduction; of the finished work to the preparatory process; of the meaning to the type; of the event to the prediction; and thus affording the only satisfactory explanation of it, consistent with the wisdom of the Godhead. In this way the proofs reciprocate; and the one can neither be established nor overthrown independently of the other.

The second thing affirmed in the apostle's words is—the *fitness and sufficiency of these scriptures*—and we may surely be allowed to include *a fortiori* the New Testament writings—*for a specific purpose;* which purpose appears to be the fitting of the *christian minister* for the various branches of his official duty;—"that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."—The "man of God" is a designation of frequent occurrence in those scriptures to which the apostle refers; and in them it is always applied to the prophets, the ministers and messengers of Jehovah. It occurs upwards of fifty times, and uniformly with this definite and restricted signification; not in the more general sense of a good man, or one that fears God. In this enlarged acceptation, it may, we admit, without the slightest impropriety, be employed: but it is the actual use of it in the scriptures we are now seeking to ascertain. In the New Testament it occurs only twice,—in the passage on which we are commenting, and in Tim. vi. 11. "But thou, O man of God, flee these things, &c." In both these instances it appears to have evidently the same sense, as in its occurrences in the Old Testament.—And the different branches of official duty, for which the "man of God" is to be fitted by the study of the divine word, are, according to the proper import of the original terms—*instruction*, *conviction*, *reformation* (or *recovery*) and *education in righteousness*.—It would be out of place to enter here into any critical analysis of the terms; but the sentiments expressed are these:—that the christian minister who is qualified for these four departments,—for teaching the doctrines of divine truth,—for convincing and refuting the opposers of these doctrines,—for correcting the errors, reforming the characters, and recovering the backslidings of men,—and for educating, or training up, the children of God in all the varieties of righteous practice,—is a "scribe well instructed unto the kingdom of God"—a "man of God, thoroughly furnished unto every good work;" and that for so furnishing and fitting him "the holy Scriptures" are the only and the all sufficient means,—to the right understanding, and the right employment of which, all other learning ought to be considered as subservient, and the real value of every branch of it to be estimated by the degree in which it contributes to this essential end. —But while it is of the furnishing of the christian minister for the due discharge of his functions that the passage speaks, it must be very obvious that the writings by which he is thus qualified to teach, to convince, to reform, and to train up in righteousness, must have in them a fitness for the direct accomplishment of the ends themselves in others; and that the diligent and prayerful study of them will serve to make all believers, as well as "the man of God," perfect, and "thoroughly to furnish them," in their various spheres, "unto all good works."

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* Dr Smith's Script. Test. to the Messiah, Book I. chap. ii. Note a.

We mean not at present to discuss the questions which have been agitated, relative to the nature and varieties of inspiration; or to bring forward the evidences for the plenary inspiration of the holy Scriptures. This we must be allowed to assume, and to include in the assumption the entire collection of the sacred writings in the Old and New Testaments. —And if we assume inspiration, we must of course be considered as assuming *authority*,—the highest authority of all—that of the inspiring Godhead.—We also inferentially assume *utility*,—the utility of the whole, the utility of every part. No part of an inspired communication can be useless. Every branch of it must serve some appropriate purpose, and must contribute directly or indirectly, to the great ends of the whole. The kind and degree of this contribution are, it is admitted, very various; but it is not, on this account, the less real. The variety in kind and degree only brings the case into analogical resemblance to others.—In the administration of providence, for example, there are greater and smaller events; but the smaller could not be wanted more than the greater; the very least has its relative position, and its end,—an end which could not be answered without it, and of which the failure might disorganize the entire system;—as in a chain of which the links are various in size, the smallest is as essential to its continuity as the largest; or as, in an extensive and complicated range of machinery, the displacing of one little pin might suspend or disturb the extensive and complicated movements of the whole.—In the human frame (that little world of divine wonders) there are vital parts, which cannot be wounded without death immediately ensuing; while there are other parts, that may be mutilated, or even entirely removed, and life remain; and in the relative importance of the functions performed by the different members and organs of the living structure there is an almost endless variety:—but all are necessary to the completeness of the body,—to the perfection of its intricate and inimitably skilful organization, and to the full attainment of all its ends, of life, and thought, and action.—In like manner, there are, in the record of divine inspiration, some facts and truths intrinsically precious and essential, the removal of which, or even their mutilation, would bereave it of its very vitality, and convert it into what it has often, inconsiderately and unscripturally, been called—a dead letter. There are other parts of the record, which derive their value from their connexion with these,—a value greater or less, in proportion as that connexion is more or less immediate. But they are all integral portions of an harmonious and perfect whole:—and, as the smallest artery or vein, the minutest vesicle, the most capillary duct, the least of the secretory glands, the slenderest filament of bone, and the most delicate fibre of nerve or muscle, goes to fill up the perfection of the animal frame; so every statement of the divine word has its place and its use, and contributes its share, however inconsiderable, to the completeness of the revelation.

And of this revelation the great leading design is clear. It was announced, in the first promise, to fallen man; and it pervades the whole Bible. It is the salvation of sinners by the mediation of the Son of God. From the moment of the entrance of sin, the whole of the Divine administration towards our world was adjusted and regulated upon one principle. All was made subservient to the scheme of mercy;—to its progressive development and its eventual execution. The entire series of events, of which the Old Testament history gives the brief detail, was so arranged as to be gradually preparatory to the fulness of time:—the redemption too, for which the train of events prepared, the types prefigured, and the prophets predicted; and then, when the fulness of time arrived, and when, by the mission and work of the Son of God, the predicted and prefigured redemption was completed, it became, under the New Testament dispensation, the grand theme of apostolic testimony.—And we would earnestly, though but for a moment, urge it upon the reader's consideration, that if he does not, by means of the Bible, obtain salvation, the Bible, as to him, has failed of its main design;—that this salvation consists in restoration to the favour and to the image of God;—that, in order to its being his, he must, through faith in Christ, be a partaker of the virtue of his atoning blood for the forgiveness of his sins, and receive of his regenerating Spirit, to sanctify him through the truth;—and that this must be no matter of mere doctrinal abstraction, but of personal possession and experience,—not to be believed respecting others, but to be known and felt in himself.

It cannot, every considerate man must at once perceive, be necessary to salvation, that all the contents of the scriptures should be understood and believed. We might well, in that case, exclaim, "who then can be saved?" In one sense, indeed, saving faith may be said to be the faith of the Bible; inasmuch as it is a principle of entire submission of the mind to divine dictation, receiving as true whatever is progressively discovered there. But, although the principle of saving faith thus embraces the whole of revelation, it cannot be by the actual belief of all that it contains, that sinners are saved; else it would follow, that by no one could salvation, even in its incipient blessings, be obtained, till he had become master of the whole. It is by the faith of what is called, by way of eminence, THE TRUTH, or, as by Paul to the Ephesians, "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation," that the sinner "passes from death unto life." But, when he has undergone the saving change, the whole word, in all its varied contents, contributes to the advancement of the life of God in his soul. Believers are admonished to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling." Phil. ii. 12, 13. They are to do this by the diligent and persevering use of all the instituted means of spiritual improvement; for they "work out their salvation," when they advance in holiness. Now, one of these means, the first and most efficient of all, is the careful and constant study, with meditation and prayer, of the sacred volume. In one view, indeed, it may even, without impropriety, be pronounced the *sole* means of spiritual growth. For whence do all the ordinances of God derive their salutary influence? Whence but from his word? They embody truth. They bring it in a lively and impressive manner before the mind. They thus contribute to give it a firmer fixture in the memory, and a more tenacious hold of the affections. In the Lord's Supper, for example, what benefit could be derived from partaking of bread and wine, were it not that in the breaking and the pouring out of these symbols "Christ crucified is evidently set forth before us," and his love in dying for us, brought vividly to our remembrance? It is the striking exhibition of truth to the mind by means of the external symbols, that gives it all its refreshing and invigorating efficacy; and we are truly profited by it, just in proportion as we receive a deeper impression of the doctrine of the cross, and are excited to "give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."

The entire word of God, in all its parts, being fitted and designed for promoting in the soul the work of spiritualisation and growth in grace,—it is a miserable mistake for any believer to rest satisfied with the mere knowledge of the fundamental articles of saving truth. This indeed has always a suspicious appearance. It looks as if there were little enjoyment in the word, and little desire after its purifying virtue; as if the sole consideration were the escaping of hell; not the attainment of holiness, but the mere deliverance from punitive visitation and physical suffering; as if all that was wished were merely as much knowledge and grace as would not actually shut out from heaven; as if, instead of an "abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,"—like a goodly vessel, entering the harbour in full sail, with safe cargo, and flying colours,—the utmost limit of desire was, to be cast, like a shipwrecked mariner, on the happy shore, barely escaping with life. The truly spiritual man will seek an enlarged acquaintance with the word of God, for its own sake, as satisfying a holy thirst for the lessons of divine wisdom; and for the sake of having the mind and heart imbued with that heavenly spirit of purity and love by which it is pervaded. "Thy word is very pure; therefore doth thy servant love it!" A fine sentiment, a high attainment! He loved it for its purity; and would have entered with all his heart into the Saviour's prayer, —"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

All the parts of the Bible are fitted for the various purposes before enumerated; some more directly for one of them, and some for another some more adapted to strike, affect, and benefit one description of minds, and others, minds of a different character. This is one of its excellencies. Its salutary lessons are presented under every diversity of form. There is no variety of mental constitution for which it has not something appropriate; no peculiarity of spiritual taste that may not find its own special gratification. There is provision for every appetite, and for every stage of life,—milk for babes, and strong meat for them that are of full age; lessons so simple that a child may comprehend them, and discoveries of such vastness and elevation, as to give more than full scope to minds of the highest order. There is a fulness, a richness, an inexhaustibleness in the Bible, that stamps it with divinity. Men never get before it. It leaves them still searching, and still discovering. It is a mine of "unsearchable riches:" the deeper it is worked, the richer and more abundant the precious ore becomes. The truths of which the knowledge is indispensable to salvation are few in number, and adapted to the slenderest capacity; but the most diligent student, however acute and capacious his powers, may spend a life-time in exploring its contents, and still find something to acquire. They are most sensible of the truth of this, who have longest and most busily worked the mine. What book, produced by man, ever combined such brevity with such fulness? What book but itself will bear to be read and studied by successive generations, century after century, and still remain new? What other book will bear to be perused by the same individual, over, and over, and over again, and leave him, after having studied it all his days, dissatisfied with his attainments in the knowledge of it; although to the end he has pursued his search with all the unpalling relish and unabating ardour of novelty, still lighting on some discovery unthought of before; and that which was first discovered never, by oft-repeated meditation, losing aught of its power to charm! What student of the sacred word does not enter with his whole soul into the psalmist's eulogy,—a eulogy, the dictate of heart-felt experience.—"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward." Psalm xix. 7—11. And who that has followed the wise man's counsel has not found the promised results of profit,—"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee: so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thy heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God: for the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the ways of his saints.

Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity, yea every good path." Prov. ii. 1—9.

Amongst other departments of instruction in the Holy Scriptures, there is a considerable portion of HISTORY;—and the history is interspersed with biographical notices of individuals and families, of which some are pregnant with interest and instruction, for all the scenes of personal, domestic, and public life. Assuming, as we have done, the divine inspiration of the Bible, there are various considerations arising from this, in regard to its historical details, which powerfully recommend them to attentive study. They stand distinguished, in various respects, from other histories, and "in all things have the pre-eminence." Among these distinguishing characteristics, we may notice,

1. Their *certainty*. The Book which contains them being ascertained to be the word of God, the mind reposes, with unhesitating confidence, in the truth of its statements. In other histories, there are not a few sources of hesitancy and distrust. The writers are all, in a greater or less degree, liable to the influence of misapprehension, of ignorance and misinformation, of party bias, and of the love of effect; so that, in reading their narratives, you have to proceed with wariness and circumspection, perusing different relations of the same events, correcting and modifying the one by the other, and generally where there is a discrepancy, striking a medium between them. But in the Bible histories, the sole inquiry is, what their statements are. The statements themselves are all sure,—the record of infallible truth. There is no harassing uncertainty, no irksome solicitude of doubt,—no sceptical wish for additional authorities,—no distressing regrets that such authorities cannot be found. The mind is at ease,—resting its belief on the authority of God, and feeling that its deductions, if legitimately drawn, partake of the same authority.

2. Their *antiquity*. They go back to earlier epochs than human narratives can reach. They inform us of times which must otherwise have been a blank, and of persons whose very names must have been for ever unknown to us. They begin with what none but God could tell, the creation of our world with its attendant circumstances; they introduce us to the parents of our race; they inform us what they were, and what by transgression they became; whence came death, and all the woes of man, whether endured in this life, or anticipated in the life to come,—and how the scheme of divine mercy was first announced in the promise of the seed of the woman to bruise the head of the serpent. They thus trace back to their respective sources both the river of human pleasures, and the dark tide of human woes; the latter to the bitter spring of man's guilt, the former to the overflowing fountain of God's love.—They present us, moreover, with a brief but faithful glance of the antediluvian

inhabitants of our earth; and, having recorded their destruction by the fearful catastrophe of the deluge, bring us into acquaintance with the second progenitors of mankind, and with all the venerable relics of the patriarchal age. They thus inform us of what, but for revelation, must have been either entirely unknown, or wrapt up in all the uncertainty and error of corrupted tradition. And how precious are these divinely preserved vestiges of antiquity, which unite the hallowed sacredness of age with the certainty of truth! What a blank would the absence of them have left in the records of human nature; and how ill, without them, should we have been able to confront the theoretical speculations of a godless philosophy, or the fantastic and sickening fooleries of a superstitious mythology!

3. A third commendatory quality of these sacred histories is their *simplicity*. This is delightful. Here is no affectation; no studied finery of style, or artifice of arrangement. All is perfect artlessness,—an artlessness, that indicates veracity in the writer, and inspires confidence in the reader. Here too there is no shading, and colouring, and varnishing; no artful concealment or palliation of the faults of favourites on the one hand; nor, on the other, any aggravation of the misdeeds, and diminution and disparagement of the virtues, of enemies. Things and persons appear before us as they actually were, the representation being uninfluenced by either fear or favour, by the desire to please or the apprehension of offending, but marked by a simplicity that is characteristically its own, in equal harmony with the antiquity and the divinity of the narratives.

4. We notice, fourthly, their pervading *piety*.—This is a remarkable feature of the inspired story. There is a constant reference of every thing to God. It "sets the Lord always before us," never allowing us to lose sight of his directing hand. He meets us at every turn. How striking the difference, in this respect, between divine and human history! We may safely regard the former, as presenting us with a specimen of the conduct of a superintending providence; of the principles by which it is guided, the ends to which it points, and the means by which it prosecutes and effects them. We want only an inspired history of other times and other countries, to show us the very same principles in constant exercise. Without divine guidance, we are unable to trace their intricate workings. We may occasionally observe them, in such occurrences as display their operation so prominently, as to stamp the non-acknowledgment of them with the perverseness of impiety. But the movements of the divine government are in general too involved and complicated for our feeble and limited penetration. There are wheels within wheels, instinct with divine life, and regulated by divine impulse, but of which the moving principle cannot be discerned, nor the ultimate

tendency ascertained. But it is delightfully encouraging to have an exemplification of the working of those principles before us, and to be assured that, however undiscernibly by us, they have been, are, and shall be, the principles of the entire administration of the Godhead, throughout the world, and to the close of time. Every devout reader of the Bible history must have felt what a salutary influence this distinguishing property of it has upon the mind; filling it with a perpetual sense of God; impressing the conviction that "all things are of him;" keeping alive the lowliness of dependance, the liveliness of gratitude, the steadfastness of trust, and the unreservedness of submission; drawing forth at every advancing step of the wonderful development of the divine counsels.—"O the depth of the riches, and wisdom, and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counseller? or who hath first given to him?—and it shall be recompensed unto him again:—for of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things. To whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever! Amen!" Rom. xi. 33—36.

5. The last thing we shall mention as a peculiarity of the Scripture histories is, what, for a want of a more appropriate term, we may call their *unity*.—By this we mean, not merely their harmony and consistency with each other, (which necessarily arises from their truth,) but the constant bearing of the whole upon one object; not only one Being presiding, but that one Being, in his wisdom, holiness, goodness, faithfulness, and power, directing every thing, as has already been hinted, to one end,—keeping invariably in his eye the advancement and completion of one great purpose. This is what we might expect. Men may overlook it; not having in their minds the same impression that there is in the divine mind, of the importance of that purpose:—but true it is, that not only the history contained in the Bible, but the entire history of our world, is a history of redemption. The first intimation, immediately after the fall, of the appointment and future coming of a Saviour, announced the leading star of the whole procedure of God, from that moment to the close of time. That intimation was in fact a proclamation of war against the great enemy of mankind, their successful seducer from their first happiness, and the malignant, unrelaxing, and mighty opposer of their restoration. That war has been carrying on ever since. The crisis of the contest was at the fulness of time. The fatal blow was then struck at the kingdom of "the prince of this world." His seeming triumph was his real overthrow. The Son of God "conquered when he fell." He triumphed on the very cross. He was "crucified through weakness:" but his weakness was the strength of victory. His death was the life of his cause. "Then was the judgment of this world; then was the prince

of this world cast out." And ever since, though with singular fluctuations, he has been breaking the power of his foe; not, as he could have done, crushing it at once, but, by driving him from post to post, crippling his resources, and abridging the extent of his dominions:—and the war shall terminate in the final suppression of his usurped and tyrannical sway, and the glorious and happy consummation of the reign of grace, and of all the plans and operations of redeeming love.—To the spiritual mind, this constant association of the whole history with the kingdom of Christ and the designs of sovereign mercy, gives it an unspeakable interest. It is a history of the development of the glory of God in the salvation of men.

The recommendatory qualities which we have thus mentioned as distinguishing the histories, belong equally of course to all the BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES, more and less full, which abound in the sacred pages.—Many are the characters introduced; all of them with perfect impartiality; each acting a part directly or more remotely connected with the great design, and occasionally presenting a striking "figure of Him that was to come;" all intended and fitted to impress, by practical exhibition, the important lessons of truth and wisdom; unfolding the influence of particular principles on conduct and on happiness,—of the good, that we may admire and imitate,—of the evil, that we may abhor and avoid.—And this biographical exhibition of principles in their practical operation has many advantages, not only over the didactic, the monitory, and the preceptive styles of writing, but even over general history. It is very true, that all the majesty of the divine name, all the weight of the divine authority, all the fearfulness of divine justice, and all the persuasiveness of divine love, are in every doctrine, every admonition, and every command, of which GOD is the Author. Yet every one is sensible, how much more lively and efficient the impression upon the mind is, when the influence of the truth is embodied in character, and, under varying circumstances, elicited in action. The difference is like that which exists between the effect produced by examining the description of a piece of machinery, looking at it in drawings, or even surveying it when its parts have been put together, but it has not yet been set in motion,—and that produced by seeing the whole in actual operation, every part answering its end, and the intended effect coming out, at the close of the process, under our eye. In the one case, we see the theoretical application of principles, and fancy to ourselves how it will work; in the other, we have the vivid impression of living movements and effected results:—theory becomes fact. and draws forth the exclamations of admiring delight.

It is in this manner that the divine character itself is brought before us in the Bible; and it is on the principle just mentioned, that the manifestation of it there is so interesting and impressive. It is set forth, not so much in description, as in action; not in a mere *catalogue raisonnée* of its various attributes, but in the practical display of the peculiar energy of each, and of the combined and harmonious operation of the whole. This display is partly made in those narratives which exemplify the general administration of his providence; but, above all, in that "special act of providence" towards man, which it is the great end of revelation to make known, the provision made for the redemption of a guilty world, and the working out of that wonderful scheme which angelic voices celebrated in their song of triumphant praise, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!" This is incomparably the sublimest and most lovely of all the manifestations of Godhead; the moral attributes of the character standing prominently forth, in the perfect union of awfully commanding majesty, and sweetly attractive grace.—In regard to the mode in which the divine character is manifested, there is a correspondence between his word and his works. In the former, as in the latter, the manifestation is still practical. In both, we see what God is, in what God hath done. His word is a discovery of more of his works. In the works of creation, there is wider and more varied display of what have been termed his *natural* attributes; in those works which his word reveals, the display is more prominent of his *moral* perfections. These are the most interesting to us, as the subjects of his government; and it is from their connexion with these, indeed, that the others derive their chief power to affect us, either in the way of fear or of love. To a sinner, knowledge and power, when associated with justice, are alarming;—when with mercy, delightful. "There are but two books," says the devout prelate whose 'Contemplations' we now introduce to the reader, "There are but two books, wherein we can read God: the one is his word; his works the other. This is the bigger volume; that the more exquisite. The characters of this are more large, but dim; of that, smaller, but clearer. Philosophers have turned over this, and erred; that, divines and studious Christians, not without full and certain information. In the works of God, we see the shadow or footsteps of the Creator; in his word, we see the face of God in a glass. Happiness consists in the vision of that infinite Majesty; and if we be perfectly happy above, in seeing him face to face, our happiness is well forward below, in seeing the lively representation of his face in the glass of the Scriptures. We cannot spend our eyes too much upon this object:—for me, the more I see, the more I am amazed, the more I am ravished with this glorious beauty." How very different is the impression made upon our minds when we are simply assured, respecting any person, however creditable the source of information, that he is a person of singular benevolence; and when we are told at once what he has actually done, or when we have ourselves the opportunity of seeing the amiable disposition of his heart enjoying its gratification in the deeds and sacrifices of disinterestedness and self-denial! How differently should we be affected by hearing a general verbal eulogy of Howard's philanthropy, and by listening to the graphic detail of his deeds, or by accompanying him in his humane career, entering with him the dungeons of bondage and wretchedness, witnessing the relief actually imparted, the light shed by him on the gloom of despair, and the speechless gratitude of its miserable victims!—And on the same principle, how much more vivid and awakening is the effect, when, instead of being merely told in words that God "delighteth in mercy," the practical evidence of that delight is set before us; when we see Him "*so* loving the world" (the Saviour leaves Nicodemus to infer the amount of the love from the nature and value of the gift bestowed by it) "*so* loving the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish but have everlasting life;"—and when we are not merely assured that "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness," but are invited to contemplate his love of righteousness in the fearful realities of Gethsemane and Calvary, where he appears "bruising and putting to grief" the Son of his everlasting love, in order to secure the honour of his justice in the free exercise of his mercy.

These observations receive a farther and most delightful exemplification in the recorded life of Him by whom, as Mediator, this work of mercy and righteousness was done. We have no formal delineation of the character of Christ; though, if ever there was a theme for ample descriptive panegyric, it was to be found in that wonderful union of human and divine—of all the sinless excellencies of the nature he had assumed, associated with all the moral beauties and sublimities of that which had belonged to him from eternity;—a character, of which the conception was too lofty for the unassisted imagination of man, and the sustaining of which in perfect and unembarrassed consistency, so that nothing, in word or deed, in all the varying scenes through which he passed, should be in the slightest degree out of *keeping* with either view of his person—"nothing extravagant, yet nothing mean—nothing beneath the God, nothing above the man"—was beyond the utmost reach of human skill; so that to ascribe the invention and support of it to the unimaginative and unlettered fishermen of Galilee, only shows, what appears in many things besides, that scepticism is chargeable with a credulity beyond that of the faith which it affects to despise. But the remark has almost tempted us to a digression. How is the character brought before us? Not, as we have said, by description; but entirely in incident, and action, and conversation. We are not told that he was devout; but he appears before us in all the purity and elevation of intimate and habitual communion with his heavenly Father:—we have no statement of his personal virtues; but we see him in all the unblemished rectitude of demeanor, contracting no taint from the contact of an ungodly world:—we have no eulogy of his benevolence; but he "goes about doing good:"—of the admirable combination of "meekness and gentleness" with fearless decision of principle, his biographers say nothing; but in his intercourse with friends and foes, these qualities unfold themselves in a manner which at once captivates our affections and commands our veneration.—No laboured panegyric is pronounced on the tenderness of his friendly sympathies; but two touching words let us into his heart—"Jesus wept:"—nor on the strength of his filial sensibility; but it overcame the tortures of the cross—"Woman, behold thy son; son, behold thy mother!"—nor on the disinterestedness of his love to perishing souls; but he agonizes for them in the garden, and expires for them on the tree. At every step of his progress, in every situation and in every company, by every word and every action, some feature of his character is brought out, and placed in a light incomparably more advantageous for impression, than could have been effected by the most eloquent eulogium. Every thing tells:—and at the close of the divinely simple and interesting narrative, we can hardly say which predominates, the lovely or the venerable: we are left in all the loftiness of adoration, and in all the tenderness of delighted affection.

In the biographical memoirs of individuals, moreover, our sympathies are more confined and appropriated, and our feeling of interest becomes proportionably more intense. We can enter more perfectly into the various circumstances of individuals, can place ourselves in their changing conditions, can rejoice with their joys, grieve with their griefs, struggle with their difficulties, tremble with their fears, glow with their hopes, and make their thoughts and words and actions our own. Here is the principal danger in regard to uninspired biographies. Their beneficial or injurious tendency depends upon the character of the author. It is in the power of a writer of sceptical and licentious principles, to give such an artful colouring to his narrative, as that, while he can hardly be charged with any direct violations of truth, he shall succeed in engaging the sympathies of his reader in behalf of the subject of his memoir, in spite of his admitted irreligion and vice; so that, instead of decided moral reprobation, there may be a hesitancy to condemn, a wish to excuse and to palliate, a pity that "melts the mind to love," and insensibly transfers the sentiment of favour from the agent to the action, in a way most prejudicial to the moral and spiritual feelings. And the same unhallowed art, which, by making the most of a specious virtue, weaves a vail to hide the deformity of vice, can also, by the lights in which it places a particular fault, or even a harmless but ludicrous foible, produce associations, of dislike or of contempt, with true goodness, equally prejudicial to the persuasive influence of its example. And the very fact we are illustrating, of the peculiar intensity of personal sympathies with personal adventures and incidents, renders this power of tainting an entire narrative with the spirit of the writer's own character, so especially perilous. We do not deny, that, to biographies of a different description, it gives a corresponding advantage in favour of religion and virtue. We rejoice to grant it, and to reflect how well, in some instances, the advantage has been improved. We mean only, that all merely human biographies require to be read with caution, and with a due consideration of the author's principles and character, his dislikes and predilections:—and we mean to state it, as one of the distinguishing recommendations of scripture biography, that it is entirely free of all such hazard. We can read it with perfect confidence. The sympathies and the aversions which the perusal engenders, are all in favour of good, and in opposition to evil. We can give ourselves up, freely and fearlessly, to its moral and spiritual influence. It can never injure us; and the more unreservedly we yield to it, our benefit will be the greater. In these circumstances, all the advantage is experienced from the personality of sympathy in biographical narrative; for if the sympathy be on the side of good, the more intense the better. Now, in general history, the agents are multiplied, and the mind's sympathies are, in a greater or less degree, divided amongst them. In proportion as any individual comes to act a particularly prominent part, to subordinate others to him, and to occupy a leading, and, for a time, almost exclusive notoriety, the history assumes the character, and is invested with the interest, of biography. For, in biography, the man who, in general history, appears only as one among many instruments in the accomplishment of its various events, becomes himself the object of individual attention. We follow him through the vicissitudes, prosperous and adverse, of his chequered life: we see, as these succeed to each other, how the principles of his character evolve themselves: and in the effects resulting from their operation, we read lessons of their excellence or of their perniciousness; we are admonished, or we are encouraged; we are guarded from evil, and stimulated to good.

The biographies of the Bible are full of the most interesting and profitable instruction. In this department, as in every other, the divine word "has the pre-eminence." The "holy men of God," who wrote these records, were under the superintendance of Him who "knew what was in man;" possessing not only a perfect acquaintance with the general character of his fallen nature, and with all the shades of variety, which it assumes in diversified circumstances, and the peculiar modifications of corruption prevalent in every heart,—but also, a perfect knowledge of all the influences which are fitted to work, with beneficial or injurious effect, on both renewed and unrenewed minds. And accordingly, in this department of the divine writings, we have the finest illustrations of human nature,—of the operation of its evil principles, in all their melancholy variety;—of the new nature, in the power and practical efficacy of its principles of spiritual life; of the struggle between the good and the evil in the best of God's children; and of the consequences, to the bosoms and the businesses, the families and the kingdoms, of men, of sin on the one hand, and of righteousness on the other. These Biblical illustrations should be used by the students of human nature, as young artists are wont to use those *chef-d'œuvres* of great masters, which, in professional language, are called *studies;* to which they sit down, with all the eagerness of a close, and minute, and persevering attention, to transfer to their own canvass, and by that means to get impressed upon their own minds, not only the general contour and expression, but all those delicate touches and recondite refinements of the perfection of art, which it is not a first glance, nor even a second or a third closer inspection, that can detect and appreciate.

In a national history, we naturally feel a peculiar interest in the characters, from their connexion with the prosperity of our own country, whether in the way of its advancement or of its retardation. If they affect, in the one way or in the other, its changing destinies, the interest they excite, either for or against them, will be in proportion to the ardour of our patriotism.—In the history, again, of the rise, and progress, and completion of any great work,—such as the reformation from popery, or the abolition of the slave-trade,—our attachment or dislike to the characters that act their respective parts in the story, will be measured by the amount of our interest in the *object*, which they contribute either to forward or to hinder. What an intensity of interest, then, ought we to feel in the characters of Scripture history, when we recollect that all of them are associated, more remotely or more immediately, with the preparation, execution, and results, of the mightiest and most merciful of all the doings of the Lord, the work of man's redemption,—and with the progress or the hindrance of that "kingdom," which is "not of this world," which is heavenly in its origin, and character, and government, and consummation,—with the darkening or the brightening of its glories, with the delaying or the hastening of its final triumph.

The observations which have thus been offered on the historical and biographical portions of the Divine word will not be thought inappropriate, as an introduction to a work, of which these histories and biographies are the avowed and exclusive ground,—the CONTEMPLATIONS of BISHOP HALL.

This is the most popular of all the works of their excellent and justly celebrated author, whose praise is in all the churches. Whatever may be thought of his Episcopacy, of the divine right of which he was a conscientious and determined advocate, or of that mother church of England to which, through his whole life, he manifested the attachment of a faithful and devoted son; there can be but one mind with regard to the personal excellencies of his character, and the exemplary discharge of his official functions: and whatever may be the opinions of different readers on the various subjects, of doctrine or of ecclesiastical polity, which employed his controversial pen; there cannot be two judgments as to the value of his devotional, practical, and critical productions. Different readers may appreciate their value in different degrees; but the reception of his works is the best evidence of the general unity of sentiment respecting their merits. And of them all there is no one that has gone through so many editions, or has fixed itself so decidedly as a favourite and standard Book in the Theological Literature of our country, as his Contemplations. We feel, indeed, as if we almost owed an apology, both to our readers and to the memory of the author, for the presumption of thus formally introducing a new edition of them to the notice of the reading public. He is already better known than any that can recommend him; and we are not without apprehension, that, with some readers, our introduction may share the fate of certain lengthy prefaces, and be passed over, to get at the work itself.—Perhaps it may serve to prevent this mortifying slight, and conciliate attention to a part at least of what we are at the pains to write, if we say something about the author himself, whose work we thus needlessly and therefore presumptuously commend. In proportion as the work is valued, and gratification and benefit derived from it, will the reader feel an interest about the writer to whom he is indebted. Our notices, however, must necessarily be very brief; for, to enter largely into the details of the distinguished Prelate's life, would lead us into the history, both civil and ecclesiastical, of the period during which he flourished,—one of the most eventful and extraordinary in the annals of our country,—and into the discussion of topics of controversy, religious and political, such as would not only require more room than we can spare, but would be very inappropriate in the preface to such a work as the one before us.—These notices will be chiefly taken from the account left by the Bishop himself, under the title of "Observations on some specialties in the life of Joseph Hall, Bishop of Norwich, written with his own hand."

And we cannot allow ourselves to enter on this brief detail, without marking the character of the man, as indicated by the opening sentences of his manuscript:—"Not out of a vain affectation of my own glory, which I know not how little it can avail me when I am gone hence; but out of a sincere desire to give glory to my God, whose wonderful providence I have noted in all my ways, have I recorded some remarkable passages of my past life. What I have done is worthy of nothing but silence and forgetfulness; but what God hath done for me is worthy of everlasting and thankful memory."—Charity binds us to believe this beautiful sentiment to have been dictated by sincere humility; because it corresponds with the general character of him who expresses it. Were it otherwise, we should be under no obligation to credence. When a man who, in the ordinary course of his behaviour, gives the clearest indications of vanity and inordinate self-esteem, employs on any occasion the language of lowliness and self-depreciation, we more than doubt and distrust it. It fills us with indignation and disgust; or it provokes merriment and scorn. But when the terms employed express a disposition that is evidently interwoven with the entire texture of the person's life who utters it, we are satisfied of its sincerity, and regard it with admiration.—That which we believe in such a case is, that the person thinks what he says. We do not mean that we are bound to concur in his estimate of himself. It may be quite otherwise. Our estimate may be the very reverse of his; and the humility which he displays may only be an addition to the other excellencies of his character,—a new charm to its loveliness,—a mellowing tint to its brilliance. When the great apostle of the Gentiles speaks of himself as "less than the least of all saints," we believe that he felt all the depth of humble-mindedness which the terms imply; but we are not bound on that account, to set him down in our own minds at the bottom of the scale:—on the contrary, the very spirit which prompts him to speak thus of himself, is so perfectly the spirit of saintship, that it contributes, with all the other attributes of his character, to elevate him the more in our admiring regards.

Bishop Hall was born July 1st, 1574, and died September 8th, 1656.—Thus his life, of more than fourscore years, embraced a period of various and absorbing interest, from the middle of the reign of Elisabeth, to the middle of the Commonwealth; during which there were brought into play, and subjected to experiment, though not always in circumstances that could yield a fair result, almost all varieties of political and religious principle, as affecting both personal character and national prosperity.—We can only notice what pertains to the Bishop himself, the history of his stormy times being out of our province.—His birth-place was Bristow-Park, in the parish of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, in Leicestershire. His father was an officer under Henry Earl of Huntingdon. His mother was eminent in piety; and, like many other good men, he owed much to the tender faithfulness of maternal instruction and counsel. He himself speaks of her in terms of affectionate and grateful admiration, such as are equally honourable to the mother and the son, and present to other sons and mothers an example deserving their imitation :—" How often have I blessed the memory of those divine passages of experimental divinity which I have heard from her mouth! What day did she pass without a large task of private devotion? whence she would still come forth with a countenance of undissembled mortification. Never any lips have read to me such feeling lectures of piety; neither have I known any soul that more accurately practised them than her own. Temptations, desertions, and spiritual comforts, were her usual theme. Shortly, for I can hardly take off my pen from so exemplary a subject,—her life and death were saint-like."

His parents, it appears, according to a practice too common now as well as then, had devoted him from his early years to the sacred calling of the gospel ministry. We do not hesitate thus to intimate our disapprobation of the practice, although the present happens to be a favourable exemplification of its results. It is very far from having been always thus propitious. And, as few things have been more extensively prejudicial to the church of Christ and to the cause of the gospel, than a graceless ministry, we cannot but condemn and regret what has in no small degree contributed to maintain and multiply this curse. The topic, we are aware, is trite; nor would we even have thus far touched upon it, but for the sake of expressing what we conceive to be the duty of Christian parents. While to destine a child to the ministry, and persist in fulfilling the destination, independently of considerations of personal godliness, we conceive to be most unwarrantable and pernicious, an injury to the individual, a stumbling-block to the world, and a profanation of the sanctuary of God; yet we regard it as the duty of all Christian parents, to keep their eye upon the best of causes, to count it their honour if any one amongst their children should be chosen as an instrument of its advancement, and, with this view, to impart to them all, and especially to such of them as may give early indications of superior mental endowments, such an education as may qualify them, should they prove the subjects of renewing grace, to spend and be spent in the "defence and confirmation of the gospel." We say, especially such children as give indications of early superiority; because we think there cannot be a more insensate mistake, a more intolerable insult to the sacred cause of God and truth, and to what ought to be esteemed the highest as well as the holiest of human vocations, than the too prevalent conception, (too prevalent still, although happily less so than formerly), that talents of a very moderate order are sufficient to be cultivated for the pulpit; that the clever members of a family must be the lawyers, the doctors, or even the men of business, and that any hum-drum well-meaning lad is good enough for a minister. For such a sentiment avowed or unavowed, we know not what terms of reprobation could be too strong; nor have we patience enough to speak calmly of the idiocy of those who hold it.

After such an education, with this view, as the place of his early residence afforded, proposals were made for his introduction to one of the universities, which, however, had nearly been frustrated by the officious suggestion of other plans; in the counteraction and removal of which obstacles, he devoutly and thankfully recognizes, (as in all things, through life he was accustomed to do,) the overruling hand of a kind providence.—He was subsequently admitted to Emmanuel college, Cambridge; whence after two years, he was near being removed on account of the expense, which, with all possible economy, was found greater than his father's means could well afford; "his not very large cistern," says the auto-biographer, having to feed many pipes beside mine." It was proposed that he should return, in the capacity of a master, to the school in which he had before been a pupil. But this too was, by the raising up of an unexpected benefactor, happily prevented; and he was restored to his university. After the expiration of six years, there was a bar in the way of his preferment, in consequence of an existing statute of the college, excluding from fellowship more than one individual of a shire; for his tutor happened to be from the same part of the country as himself. But another noble friend, hearing of this difficulty, provided otherwise for the tutor; by which means a vacancy was declared and, the election being left open, Mr Hall was unanimously chosen to fill it. The circumstances of this case, however gave occasion for the display of a fine feature of character. After the examination of candidates had proceeded for two days, the sudden death of the countess of Huntingdon deranged the plans which were to have provided for his tutor; and the pupil, with ingenuous and grateful disinterestedness, insisted on progress being stayed in his behalf; but the place having been already pronounced vacant, the case was, by the college laws, beyond remedy.—He was six or seven years in the university as a fellow of his college, during which time he was for two years successively lecturer in rhetoric; and associated intense study with fervent piety; enjoying, as he expresses it, "such contentment as the rest of my life hath in vain striven to yield."

Having entered into sacred orders, he was "no niggard of the talent which his God had intrusted to him, but preached often, as occasion offered, both in country villages abroad, and at home in the most awful auditory of the university.—Having spent there about thirteen years, he received an appointment to the mastership of Tiverton school; his acceptance of which, however, was suspended by his presentation at the same time to the Rectory of Halsted in Suffolk. When he had been two years resident there, "the uncouth solitariness of his life," as he quaintly expresses himself, "and the extreme incommodity of that single house-keeping, drew his thoughts to condescend to the necessity of a married estate." Our female readers, we fear, may not like him the better for this ungallant style of speech, and, with becoming spirit, may be at a loss to discover the depth of the "condescension" displayed in thinking of a help-meet, or the direness of the "necessity" by which he was driven to such a step:—and none, we are sure, on the other side of the house, whom providence has blessed with good wives,—and but few, we presume, of those who have wives yet to seek,—will be disposed to sympathise with the young divine in his feelings of extreme hardship in being compelled by the "incommodity" of celibacy into a connexion, which the one enjoys as the richest earthly sweetener of life, and which presents itself to the eye of the other as one of the fairest and most enchanting visions of hope. Some few wretched victims there may be of matrimonial infelicity, who will think, with a sigh, that the terms are abundantly well-warranted. Such we can only pity; and pity the more sincerely, if their consciences tell them (as in most instances we are persuaded they may), that they have themselves to blame.—By circumstances in which, with his usual piety, he recognizes the hand of Providence, Mr Hall was led to that connexion, which lasted for the unwonted period of forty-nine years; and which gave birth to a large family of children, whose respective histories we cannot afford room to trace.

Two years after his marriage, he was induced to travel on the continent with Sir Edmond Bacon; the consideration which chiefly weighed with him, in procuring his consent, being his desire "to inform himself ocularly of the state and practices of the Romish church."—His means were very scanty in his Rectory at Halsted; yet, could he have procured only a very small addition to them, he would never have songht a removal. On going, however, soon after his return from his continental tour, to London, having been urged to visit the court of prince Henry at Richmond, where his "Contemplations" had previously recommended him, and having there preached more than once with much acceptance, he was nominated one of the prince's chaplains. About the same time, through the favour of a new patron, he was presented with the living of Waltham Holy Cross. This was in the year 1612; in which year too, being the thirty-eighth of his age, he took his degree of doctor in divinity.

He was high in favour with prince Henry, who was then, for his amiableness, accomplishments, and personal virtues, the pride and hope of England. The place which Dr Hall held in the good graces of such a Prince, who wished (although the wish was modestly declined) to have him constantly in attendance at his court, contained a testimony in his favour which was in perfect harmony with every other. The testimony, indeed, might be truly said to have been reciprocal; the prince's attachment to such a servant of Christ, being as creditable to his highness himself as to the divine, and reflecting as great an honour on the patron as on the object of his admiration and choice.

Dr Hall was next made a prebendary of Wolverhampton; but, after having succeeded in recovering certain emoluments belonging to that church, he resigned the prebend in favour of another, whose spiritual care he knew would be of advantage to the people. He himself was subsequently, while absent upon an embassy to France, created by the king Dean of Worcester.—After his return, he accompanied his majesty, by special desire, to Scotland, on an infatuated royal visit, the pertinacious prosecution of whose object, in subsequent reigns, was the source, to our ill-used but happily resolute countrymen, of so sad an accumulation of unrighteous suffering; a visit, from which James reaped no result at the time, but contempt of his authority and disregard of his commands.

In 1618, Hall was nominated one of the four divines who represented England in the famous synod of Dort. The distinguishing qualities of these four representatives, Carleton, Davenant, Ward, and Hall, are thus described by Fuller: "In Carletono prælucebat episcopalis gravitas; in Davenantio subactum judicium; in Wardo, multa lectio; in Hallo expedita concionatio:"—Carleton was distinguished for episcopal dignity; Davenant for a well-disciplined judgment; Ward for extensive reading; and Hall for readiness and fluency of public address. The synod held its sittings, from November 1618, till the end of May in the following year. But, Hall's constitution not agreeing with the place, and a temporary change of air, by his removal to the Hague, having proved ineffectual for his convalescence, he was obliged, after only two months' stay, to return to England; to the no small regret of the whole body of representatives, who not only held him in high esteem for his qualifications as a divine, but who felt the benefit of his moderation and pacific temperament; and who showed him every mark of respect and sympathy upon his necessary withdrawment.—His sentiments, we have hinted, were moderate; and he displayed their moderation afterwards, as well as in the deliberations at Dort, when the same disputes ran violently high in England.

It is painful to find fault with such a character as that of the excellent prelate whose work it is our present object to recommend. But we cannot exculpate him from the charge of unbecoming adulation to royalty, and to the great in general. This was one of the fashions and faults of the times, against which such a man as Hall should have set his face, discouraging it by ministerial reprehension, and discountenancing it by the weight of his example. But such adulation as that with which he loads king James the First in his sermon entitled "a Holy Panegyric," preached on the anniversary of his majesty's inauguration, posterity, who have formed a more impartial estimate of that monarch's character, feel it exceedingly difficult to regard as having been *bona fide* sincere. He himself, indeed, will not admit that it should be called adulation, because it was not uttered to the king's face. "If I were to speak before my sovereign king and master," says he, "I would praise God for him, not praise him to himself. A small praise to the face may be adulation, though it be within bounds; a great praise in absence may be but justice." The sentiment is excellent; and, had the king been dead, and had there been none to report to him what was said of him, no "bird of the air to carry the voice, nothing that had wings to tell the matter," the preacher might have had full credit for the intimation that the panegyric was not meant for the royal ear. But the eulogy could not fail to reach its object. What the courtier's ear heard, the courtier's tongue would tell; and the eulogist, moreover, could hardly fail to anticipate, that the praise which fell not upon the ear of his royal master would soon come to his eye; the Discourse being immediately published, at the request of the lord mayor of London. In this way, the very mention of the king's absence, as taking off from what was said of him the imputation of flattery, only served to impart to the flattery, fulsome as it was, the semblance of delicacy, and so to render it the more *piquant* and insinuating. James was an admirer of episcopacy, and a zealous supporter of the English church; and we doubt not that an overweening estimate of the royal favour to the hierarchy, and of his majesty's support of all that was ecclesiastical, served to blind the eyes of this and other good men to the personal and even the kingly failings (if we may use so gentle a term) of the object of their admiration; an admiration, of which the utter extravagance rendered it as nauseous in some things, as it was ludicrous in others. Bishop Hall's adulation was measured and temperate, when compared with that of some others; and when we hear churchmen, and men of true godliness, holding up to public wonder the *piety* of a monarch like James, the propensity to smile at the incongruity is checked by the seriousness of concern for the mischief which the commendation of *such* sanctity was calculated to work. Royal zeal for the church is a very different article from personal zeal for God and godliness. The former may exist in abundant ardour without the latter, nay, even with its very opposite. The good acts of the king may compensate, in his own mind, and in the minds of others, for the bad acts of the man; royal devotion may become a cover for personal profanity; and the monarch may be looking with complacency to heaven, while the sinner should be penitently praying for deliverance from hell.

Having "with much humble deprecation, refused the bishopric of Gloucester, which was earnestly proffered to him," Dr Hall was subsequently raised to that of Exeter, in which he continued for six years; and in 1641, when Charles I., during his absence in Scotland, issued orders for the filling up of the vacancies in the English church, one of the changes thence arising was his translation to the see of Norwich.

Into the part which Hall acted, as a spiritual peer, in the parliamentary transactions of that stormy period which brought on the fatal end of the first Charles and the rise of the Commonwealth, it is impossible for us, as we have already hinted, to enter, without involving ourselves in discussions, both political and ecclesiastical, on which different readers would have different minds, and on which, however important, it is quite foreign to the purpose of our present Essay to pronounce any decision. We shall only say, that, unhappy as those times were to the immediate actors and sufferers, whether in church or state, they were most auspicious, in their ultimate results, to the civil and religious liberties of our country; having, under the direction of that kind and wonder-working providence which "from seeming evil still educes good," proved the spring of all that we now enjoy of both.

While in the see of Exeter, Dr Hall was one of the thirteen bishops who, in 1641, were impeached, by the commons, of high crimes and misdemeanors, on the ground of certain canons passed in convocation the preceding year,—an impeachment, however, which came to nothing, being allowed, after the bishops' defence, to die away in silence.—He was one also, at a subsequent period, of the twelve protesting prelates, who, being prevented by personal fear of popular insult and violence from attending in their places in parliament, drew up an address to the king and the house of lords, (at the recommendation and under the direction of the archbishop of York, who was at their head,) a *protestation* against whatever measures should be adopted by the house in their absence, as invalid and null. For this extraordinary and ill-timed procedure, they were impeached of high treason, and committed to the tower; whence they were for a time refused bail; and whither, on their being admitted to bail by the lords, they were re-committed by the indignant commons; till, after various postponements of trial, after privation of temporal estates and spiritual promotions, their petition for release was eventually granted, upon their giving bond to the amount of five thousand pounds. The whole period of their confinement was from January 1st, 1642, till Whitsunday of the same year. In his "Letter from the Tower," his "Free Prisoner," and his "Hard Measure," we have bishop Hall's own account, at once of the hardships of their case,—which in those days of anti-episcopal ferment were not likely to be mitigated by any special favour;—of the innocence of their motives,—for which, from the hastiness with which the step was taken, credit may be given them, at any rate to the extent that there was more in it of inconsiderate rashness and fear for their order, than of any thing deserving the charge of traitorous purpose;—of the placid tranquillity of his own spirit, and of the manner in which he employed himself,—which were both in perfect harmony with what his godly character might have led us to expect.—After his release from the tower, he immediately withdrew to Norwich, his new diocese, his translation to which had taken place so recently before his commitment that he had not previously visited it. There he represents himself as having been received with greater respect than such troublous times warranted him to anticipate; as having preached in the cathedral, on the day after his arrival, "to a numerous and attentive people;" and as having continued to officiate, "not sparing of pains," till he was "forbidden by men, and at last disabled by God."

During the confusion of multifarious sects and doctrines, although his sentiments were those of moderation, he was, as we have said, a warmly attached son of the church; whose interests he maintained against both popery and all sectarianism, denouncing, as is too usual with churchmen, all separation from her communion, however conscientious, under the misapplied designation of *schism*, and most sincerely and feelingly lamenting over all her wrongs and dangers.—There is no room to question the sincerity and depth of this amiable prelate's convictions of the divine right of episcopacy, or the sober reality of his apprehensions for the safety of all religion, as essentially involved in the stability of the hierarchy. These apprehensions, and especially his horror of independency, are at times expressed, it is true, in terms at which a modern independent may innocently be allowed to smile; although he will still find many who will be far from sympathising with his mirth, and who will see no extravagance whatever in the representation of the effects to be expected from the prevalence of that "anarchical fashion," when they are symbolised by "the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah," or by the prophetic description of the desolation of "proud and glorious Babylon"—"The shepherds shall not make their folds there; wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and our houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there; and the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in our desolate palaces."—Not a few will think, that such morbid anticipations were abundantly verified in the times of what they term puritanical fanaticism, which ensued under the usurpation of Cromwell. And yet it can hardly admit of a question, that, with all the enthusiasm, and cant, and hypocrisy, and wickedness practised under the mask of sanctity, of which, it were foolish to deny, there was too rank an exuberance, there was, at the same time, during the commonwealth, a larger proportion of genuine spiritual godliness in the country, than in any other period of England's history;—nor will it admit of greater question, that whatever mixture there might be of good and evil principle in the transactions of that period, and of the distressing years which preceded and introduced it, and whichsoever of the two might have the average preponderance, it was then that, amidst many and grievous inconsistencies, the rights of conscience and the principles of religious liberty, began to be understood;—so that the blasts of that tempestuous age rocked the cradle of British freedom.

That in those times, when prelatical as well as royal domination was so much the object of jealousy and aversion, "hard measure" should be dealt out to the bishops, when any occasion presented itself for bringing them under censure and prosecution, is no more than might have been anticipated; and Hall, who was conscientiously and tenaciously attached to episcopacy, came in officially for his share of this hard measure, notwithstanding all the amiableness of his personal character. He had, without question, just ground for complaint, the usage experienced by him having been, in undeserved and gratuitous severity, such as cannot at all be justified. It is imputable to the anti-episcopal sternness of the parliamentary character, and in part to the unsanctioned harshness of those by whom the orders of parliament were carried into execution. After his retirement to Norwich, upon his release from the tower, an ordinance was passed for sequestrating the estates of notorious delinquents. This order comprehended the twelve protesting bishops, and Hall of course as one of them. He was thus, in his declining years, deprived at once of the revenues of his bishopric, and of his real and personal estate; privations which could not fail to produce, and especially to one so long accustomed to rank and abundance, no small measure of personal and domestic distress. It is impossible, moreover, for any reader of sensibility and right principle, whatever may be his political or ecclesiastical predilections, not to feel indignant, when he thinks of the piety, the amiableness, the moderation, and the years, of this excellent and venerable prelate, at the personal insults offered to him, and the pitiful meanness and rapacity with which the orders for sequestration were carried into effect. "The soldiers," says Neale, "used him severely, turning him out of his palace, and threatening to sell his books, if a friend had not given bond for the money at which they were appraised.—The bishop complained very justly of this usage, in a pamphlet entitled *Hard Measure*. At length the parliament, to make him some amends, voted him £40 per annum; and when the war was over, in 1647, they took off the sequestration from his estate; and the bishop lived peaceably upon it afterwards, spending his time in acts of charity, meditation, and solitude."—The date of the order referred to for removing the sequestration is February 15th, 1647: yet in his "Hard Measure," although it bears date more than three months later, the bishop takes no notice of such an order; from which silence it has, by certain writers, with apparent reason, been inferred, that the order, like many others, had been without effect. He appears, for some time at any rate, to have had nothing to live upon but the pitiful pittance arising from the allowance, for the maintenance of the wives and children of delinquents, of the *fifths* of their personal estates. The hardships of his lot are dwelt upon, as might be expected, with minuteness of detail and with unmeasured reprobation, by writers of the church party; and it were foolish to deny, and unfeeling not to regret, that too much ground was given them for their censure.

After having been driven from his palace, without sufficient time being allowed him to provide another residence, and his offer to take it at a rent being refused,—he "retired" (according to Jones, in his recent Memoir of the Bishop's Life and Times,) "to a small estate which he rented at Heigham, a hamlet in the western suburbs of Norwich," and there spent the short remainder of his days. In his old age, he became the victim of most severe and torturing diseases, strangury and stone, his sufferings from which he is recorded to have borne with the most exemplary patience and submission, till death brought them to a close on the eighth day of September, 1656, in the 82d year of his age.

The devout humility of his spirit appears in his latter will, where, after deprecating funeral pomp in his interment, he adds, "I do not hold God's house a meet repository for the dead bodies of the greatest saints." There might, in this "monition" to his executors, be a tincture, perhaps of superstitious reverence for consecrated ground. But the devout temper of the man leads us to regard it as the dictate of real "lowliness of mind."—Contrary, however, to the terms of this "monition," he was buried in the chancel of Heigham church—a black marble stone being erected over his tomb, bearing a short and simple inscription, over which are the arms of the see of Norwich, impaling those of his family, and surmounted by a mitre.

Into any criticism on the writings at large of this distinguished prelate, we mean not to enter. The field is too extensive and diversified to admit of it.—In his youth, it appears, he paid court to the Muses, and produced, at the age of twenty-three, his Satires, in six books, the first three denominated "Toothlesse," and the others "Byting,"—and the whole under the quaint title of "Virgedemiarum," signifying a collection of rods. In these he lashes, with a free and keen severity, the moral, and fashionable, and literary follies and vices of his day. The thorns of piercing invective and irony are intertwined with the flowers of poesy; and, in the estimation of the most competent judges, the compositions entitle him to no mean rank, both as a poet and a satirist. The accomplished author of the Pleasures of Hope says of him, and his opinion is in harmony with that of previous critics, that "in the point, and volubility, and vigour of Hall's numbers, we might frequently imagine ourselves perusing Dryden."—It may seem strange, that a man of so mild and amiable a temperament should have discovered so much of this satirical vein,—so much severity and expertness in the use of the lash. But it is no very extraordinary case. The gentle Cowper affords another exemplification of the seeming anomaly. We cannot indeed admit the application to this amiable bard himself of the first part of his own line, describing poets in general,—

> "——— We who make no honey, though we sting;"

for he *has* made honey,—honey of the sweetest and richest flavour. His poetry, like the ancient land of promise, "flows with milk and honey." But he stings too; and his sting is sharp and blistering. Even his humour, delightfully playful in general, is at times exquisitely sarcastic; and his satirical wit is attic and poignant. His honey, too, instead of contributing, like honey in general, to mollify and heal the stings of his wit, has the very opposite effect; every person being sensible, that the kindlier the natural disposition of the reprover, the more keenly do we feel his reproofs. This apparently incongruous combination of the gentle and the severe, of the sweetness of benevolence with the bitterness of satirical invective, may be partly accounted for by the obvious consideration, that in proportion as the sensibilities of kindness are tender and susceptible, must the emotions of indignation be vehement against whatever offends them,—whatever is contrary to the temporal or spiritual weal of mankind; in proportion as the social sympathies are delicate and refined, will indelicacy and rudeness provoke their sensitive subject; in proportion as the imagination is chastened and the taste polished, will the vulgarities, conceits, and extravagancies of literary pretension draw from the quiver the darts of sportive ridicule, or of angry censure; in proportion as the spirit predominates of genuine self-diffidence and modesty, will disgust be excited and expressed at the pompous petulance of ignorant self-sufficiency.

But poetry was the occupation only of our author's youthful days. When fairly entered on the proper business of his life, he found its various functions more than sufficient to occupy his time, without the comparatively recreative service of the Muses. He did indeed at one time propose a poetical version of the Psalms, having been solicited by some friends to undertake this arduous task. But he proceeded no further in it than the first ten.—His other works are voluminous and diversified. He was much engaged in controversy; having been one of the most noted champions of his day, in defending the claims of the English episcopacy against the antichristian pretensions of popery, and against the various sects and parties of orthodox and heterodox dissent. His controversial productions amount to considerably more than a tithe of his works; including, besides his disputes with the Romanists and the dissenters, discussions on the *five points* of litigation between the remonstrants and anti-remonstrants, or the Arminians and Calvinists, in the synod of Dort, and subsequently in the church of England itself.—We certainly should not, from his controversial pieces alone, be led to conclude, that he had taken up the gauntlet by constraint, and fought unwillingly. There appears in them no small measure of the same spirit of keen invective which had discovered itself in his satires. It ought not, however, to be forgotten, that a man may be driven into controversy by an imperative sense of duty overcoming his natural disposition,—forced into war, while peace is his native element;—and that, when this is the case, the very feeling of its being against the grain may give rise to a bitterness and acrimony which appear strangely out of harmony with the writer's usual reputation for meekness and urbanity. By the force put upon his inclination, his spirit is fretted. He is doing what he *must* do, rather than what he *chooses* to do; and he is chafed by his very impatience to be done with it. Whatever forces us out of the course which we should prefer, is apt to have this effect; and so to infuse into our opposition more venom than we are even aware, and to make our writings belie our character. It is wonderful, too, in what different and opposite lights the same expressions will appear to the writer himself and to his adversary, or to the adherents, respectively, of the one and of the other;—how diverse from the consciousness of our own minds, may be the spirit imputed to our words;—and how even what was meant by us for honey may be distilled into gall, by passing through the alembic of a critical antagonist. We may, therefore, give our excellent prelate full credit for sincerity, when he thus expresses himself in the Dedication to the Fourteenth Book of his Contemplations:—"After some unpleasing intermissions, I return to that task of contemplation, wherein only my soul findeth rest. If in other employments I have endeavoured to serve God and his church, yet in none, I must confess, with equal contentment. Methinks controversy is not right in my way to heaven; however the importunity of an adversary may force me to fetch it in. If truth, oppressed by an erroneous teacher, cry, like a ravished virgin, for my aid, I betray it if I relieve it not: when I have done, I return gladly to these paths of peace. The favour which my late polemical labour hath found (beyond merit) from the learned, cannot divert my love to those wrangling studies. How earnestly doth my heart rather wish an universal cessation of these arms; that all the professors of the dear name of Christ might be taken up with nothing but holy and peaceable thoughts of devotion; the sweetness whereof hath so far affected me, that, if I might do it without danger of misconstruction, I could even beg of an enemy this leave to be happy."—Into the history and particular character of his different controversial productions, it would be out of place for us now to enter.—Neale says of him, "He was more happy in his practical than in his polemical writings;"—an estimate, in which the friends of episcopacy may not all, perhaps, be disposed to acquiesce:—and yet, when the peculiar excellence of his practical writings is considered, the acquiescence might still leave abundant ground for their admiration of the polemical. There cannot be a question, that the former have been the principal means of his usefulness, and the chief basis of his fame. "He is," says Fuller, and most readers will subscribe to the ratio of merit thus assigned to the different classes of his works,—"He is not unhappy at controversies, more happy at comments, very good in his characters, better in his sermons, best of all in his meditations."—His comments, and characters, and sermons, we must be allowed at present to pass without special notice, however deserving of it, and to come to the volumes which this Essay is particularly intended to recommend.

Of the manner in which the "Contemplations" were composed, the bishop himself informs us, in a notice to the reader prefixed to certain portions of them which are detailed at full length, instead of being given in their condensed form:—"The reader may be pleased to understand, that my manner hath still been, first to pass through all these divine histories by way of sermons, and then after, to gather the quintessence of those larger discourses into these forms of meditations which he sees: only I have thought good, upon these two following heads, for some good reasons, to publish the sermons in their own shape, as they were delivered, without alteration. It seems not amiss, that some of those metals should be shown in the ore, whereof so great a quantity was presented in the wedge."—The "Contemplations," then, are the concentrated essence of longer discourses. They are gold, not in the ore, but in the wedge. And yet, if we take the two entire discourses, on the pool of Bethesda and on the transfiguration, as specimens, the quantity of refuse even in the ore is far from being great.—In a dedication to king Charles the First, he states, that the Contemplations on the Old Testament had engaged his attention (amidst many necessary, and sometimes unpleasing intermissions) for twenty years:—so that, as those on the New Testament form about a third part of the whole, we may infer,—adopting the same average ratio,—that from first to last they extended through the long period of about thirty years.—The impression upon his own mind of the nature and importance of his subject may be learned from his language in the dedications to the second and third books: "I durst appeal," says he in the former, "to the judgment of a carnal reader (let him not be prejudicate) that there is no history so pleasant as the sacred. Set aside the majesty of the indicter: none can compare with it for the magnificence and antiquity of the matter, the sweetness of compiling, the strange variety of memorable occurrences:—and if the delight be such, what shall the profit be of that which was written by God for the salvation of man! I confess, no thoughts did ever more sweetly steal me and time away, than those which I have employed in this subject; and I hope none can equally benefit others:—for if the mere relation of these things be profitable, how much more when it is reduced to use!" —In the other he says, briefly but strongly—"I know, and in all humility confess, how weak my discourse is, and how unworthy of this divine subject which I have undertaken; which if an angel from heaven should say he could sufficiently comment upon, I should distrust him." —It is very true, that when man or angel becomes commentator upon God, the human or angelic comment must ever be infinitely inferior to the divine original. But, dismissing the comparison of the Creator and the creature, and regarding men comparatively with men, few readers will concur with the worthy prelate in his humble opinion of his own incompetency; for assuredly, judging from the actual result, few men have ever possessed qualifications more eminently fitting them for such a task; and where is the reader who has not felt these meditations "steal himself and time away," imparting in the perusal, equal pleasure and profit,—at once delighting and enriching?—With great truth does the bishop add, and "without any vain boasting"—"These thoughts, such as they are, through the blessing of God, I have woven out of myself, as holding it, after our Saviour's rule, better to give than to receive. It is easier to heap together large volumes of others' labours, than to work out lesser of our own; and the suggestion of one new thought is better than many repeated."—He must be an extraordinary reader, and a still more extraordinary thinker, who does not, in these contemplations, find many thoughts which add to their intrinsic truth and excellence the charm of originality and novelty. There is much of what is new and original, conveyed with terseness and pithiness, a general chasteness, and a frequent elegance and even eloquence of expression. He obtained in his day, the designation of the English Seneca, for the pureness, plainness, and fulness of his style. It is very true, (how could it be otherwise?) that not a few of his words and phrases are in our day obsolete, and that the antiquity of his style may now and then have involved a particular sentiment in abstruseness and obscurity; but a little attention will remove the difficulty, and the discovery of the meaning will repay well the trouble of finding it,—the beauty that starts forth from behind the vail amply compensating for the pains of drawing it aside. Nay to us, in perusing these writings, there is a charm in the very quaintness of the antique. We enjoy it, as we do the rust and the strange fashion of an ancient piece of armour, or the curious workmanship, and adaptation to its use, of any other relic of the "olden time." How differently are we affected by this style in its primitive naturalness, and *naïveté*, and appropriateness to its own age, and by any modern attempt at the imitation of it! If the imitation were designed only as an exemplification of the skill of the writer in copying different descriptions of style, we should, in that case, admire it, as a specimen of art, in proportion to the degree of the artist's success. But when it is *bonâ fide* adopted as the writer's own; when he tries to give a venerable air to modern thoughts by arraying them in an antiquated garb; it then becomes affectation, and, according to circumstances, it amuses, or it disgusts us. It is a species, too, of literary imposition; and imposition is always provoking. We are fretted at the reflection upon our perspicacity, implied in the attempt to cozen us into the imagination that we are reading some one of the venerated worthies of former centuries; and as the modern is continually obtruding itself in spite of the disguise, there is ever and anon produced a ludicrous and grotesque patch-work, at which we are fain to laugh, as a relief from our disgust and indignation. It is as if some sprig of divinity, in this our day, should make the discovery of an ancient moth-eaten wardrobe of the age of puritanism, and should fancy that he might attract to himself some portion of the reverence attached to that age, by making his *entrèe* into the pulpit, on a Sunday morning, habited in the full costume, from the skull-cap downwards; and withal, at every place where the moths had unfortunately committed their devastations, the said costume nicely filled up with a large patch of modern stuff, different in colour and material, and after the fashion of modern habiliments. Alas! for the veneration. *Risum teneatis amici?* Not less offensive and ludicrous is the setting forth of modern ideas in the vestments of ancient style.

While it is true, that there are necessarily some obsolete modes of expression, and some that are not quite in harmony with modern notions of refined taste; it is true too, that occasionally there are others which may be thought, by the over-fastidiousness of these days, sufficiently close upon the bounding line of delicacy, and others still, at which the sensitiveness of piety may startle as even bordering on the profane. The considerate and judicious reader will bear in mind, on such occasions, the difference between the one age and the other. The excellent editor of the last edition of the bishop's whole works, (the Rev. Josiah Pratt) says, on this point, with great propriety—"In the author's style no alteration whatever has been made; even in cases where the change of public taste may now affix ideas of indelicacy or irreverence to expressions, which conveyed no such feelings in the author's age; and this, because the editor wished the reader to be fully satisfied that he was in possession of his author unaltered; and he felt it to be impracticable, if he altered at all, so to do it as not to incur the censure of doing it either too little or too much, according to the judgment and taste of the reader." There will be found, however, less occasion for the application of this remark in the practical and devotional departments of his writings, to which the "Contemplations" belong, than in the narrative and controversial.

In the Contemplations, we have an admirable exemplification of the uses of sacred history and biography, as these have been illustrated in the beginning of this Essay. They bring out, with great force and effect, the views both of the Divine character and of the human, which those narratives are designed to unfold. They contain a vast fund of practical wisdom, drawn from the highest source. We are not acquainted, indeed, with any work, from which a larger number might be selected, of pithy sententious maxims, and moral apophthegms, of the most salutary use in all the departments of personal and social conduct. We had begun to mark off a specimen; but we found it would be endless, and thought it better to leave them, with this general notice, to the reader's own discovery.—Nor do we know any work that more successfully blends the instructive with the entertaining. The Contemplations are very rarely dull; they are full of life and sprightliness; never long-winded, prosing, and soporific. The reader who wishes a lullaby—(for which, it is alleged, some tomes of somniferous theology have occasionally been employed)—must not take up Bishop Hall; he must rather have recourse to *him*, when he has got heavy over duller works. The Bishop will rouse him, and keep him awake. He will not read half a page, without meeting with some strikingly original and forcibly conceived sentiment; some vivacious sally of wit; some brilliant meteor of fancy; some ingenious and appropriate allusion; some exquisite touch of pathos; some stroke of delicate satire; some novel and entertaining view of fact or character; some awakening appeal to the conscience; or some pure and lofty aspiration of piety.—With a happy allusion to the interesting passage of Elijah's history, when, fleeing from the face of Ahab and Jezebel, he rested, and slept, and received his angel-visits, under the juniper tree in the wilderness, the author says, in dedicating the Nineteenth Book to Edward Lord Denny—"None can challenge so much right in these Meditations as your lordship, under whose happy shade they received their first conception. Under this juniper of yours, have I, not driven by force, but drawn by pleasure, slept thus long, sweetly, safely, and have received these angelical touches." The allusion might serve as a specimen of much of a similar easy and felicitous description, in his writings themselves; and many are the readers who have felt and owned the appropriateness of the designation given to these portions of them; a designation, however, meant by him to express not his own high estimation of their heavenly excellence, but the sacred delight which they yielded him, and his gratitude to God for the divinely-bestowed enjoy ment. They are truly "*angelical touches:*"—and if the same allusion may be pursued a little further, they have furnished provision to multitudes besides himself,—in the strength of which they have prosecuted, with increased alacrity, their journey to the mount of God.—"He, being dead, yet speaketh;" and speaketh in such a manner, that, after the lapse of two centuries, he still commands a hearing, and is listened to with attention, delight, and profit by successive generations. While he lived, he had ever a vivid and practical impression of the value of time. "Every day," says he, "is a little life; and our whole life is but a day repeated:—whence it is, that old Jacob numbers his life by days; and Moses desires to be taught this point of holy arithmetic, to number, not his years, but his days. Those, therefore, that dare lose a day are dangerously prodigal; those that dare mispend it, desperate." We are very sure, that those days of his life were neither mispent nor lost, which were occupied in the composure of these admirable "Contemplations;" and equally sure, that those hours will never bring regret in the recollection, which have been devoted to their studious and repeated perusal. And if these our introductory lucubrations, of how little value soever they may be deemed in themselves, shall, in any degree, serve the purpose for which they are designed, of recommending them to still more general attention, we shall be satisfied that we have not been wasting time in the writing of them.—We know no work to which we might more emphatically prefix the motto—"PRODESSE ET DELECTARE"—than these Contemplations of Bishop Hall:—and he who himself has little power either to delight or to profit, may deserve well of his reader for the humbler service of introducing him to one who is a master in both these arts and ends of writing. And yet (we must repeat) we are sensible, that for any one to speak of introducing and recommending Bishop Hall, is itself an act that savours of presumptuous vanity;—introducing and recommending an author, who has already stood, with universal acceptance, the probation of two hundred years! We will rather say, that we count it an honour to have our own name thus associated with his:—and if our readers, on proceeding from the introduction to the work, shall soon lose all sight and recollection of the former, we must be satisfied with the fate of the morning star, which, having acted as the harbinger of the rising day, is himself quickly lost in the succeeding light.

We may close with confirming our own high estimate of the "Contemplations" by the judgment of two divines of justly eminent popularity. In a note to the eighth dialogue of his Theron and Aspasio, Mr Hervey, referring to Bishop Hall's works, speaks of them as writings, "in which the reader will find a happy mixture of true oratory and sound divinity; a rich vein of fancy, and a sweet spirit of piety; Contemplations upon the histories of scripture (which I think are our prelate's master-piece) as entertaining and instructive, as the subjects illustrated are important and wonderful. Notwithstanding a few stiff or antique phrases, I cannot but esteem the works of this author among the most valuable compositions extant in our language."—And Dr Doddridge, in a note to the "Improvement" of the eighty-fifth Section of his Family Expositor, referring to the beautiful exemplification of the power and importunity of faith in the character of the Syrophenician woman who interceded with the Saviour for her daughter, thus expresses himself:—"The pious, moderate, and elegant Bishop Hall has a fine 'Contemplation' on this subject, to which I refer the reader with pleasure; and take this opportunity of observing, that (allowing something for the peculiarities of the age in which he lived) I have met with no devotional writings on the historical parts of Scripture, which have generally given me so much entertainment as his." He elsewhere characterises the CONTEMPLATIONS as "incomparably valuable, for language, criticisms, and devotion."

R. W.

GLASGOW, *April 1st*, 1831.

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CONTEMPLATIONS.

BOOK I.

CONTEMPLATION I.—THE CREATION.

What can I see, O God, in thy creation, but miracles of wonders? Thou madest something of nothing, and of that something all things. Thou, which wast without a beginning, gavest a beginning to time, and to the world in time. It is the praise of us men, if, when we have matter, we can give fashion: thou gavest a being to the matter, without form; thou gavest a form to that matter, and a glory to that form. If we can finish but a slight and imperfect matter according to a former pattern, it is the height of our skill: but to begin that which never was, whereof there was no example, whereto there was no inclination, wherein there was no possibility of that which it should be, is proper only to such power as thine: the infinite power of an infinite Creator! With us, not so much as a thought can arise without some matter; but here, with thee. all matter arises from nothing. How easy is it for thee to repair all out of something, which couldst thus fetch all out of nothing! Wherein can we now distrust thee, that hast proved thyself thus omnipotent? Behold, to have made the least clod of nothing, is more above wonder, than to multiply a world! But now the matter doth not more praise thy power, than the form thy wisdom. What beauty is here! what order! What order in working! what beauty in the work!

Thou mightest have made all the world perfect in an instant, but thou wouldst not. That will, which caused thee to create, is reason enough why thou didst thus create. How should we deliberate in our actions, which are so subject to imperfection; since it pleased thine infinite perfection (not out of need) to take leisure? Neither did thy wisdom herein proceed in time only, but in degrees: at first thou madest nothing absolute; first, thou madest things which should have being without life; then, those which should have life and being; lastly, those which have being, life, reason: So we ourselves, in the ordinary course of generation, first live the life of vegetation, then of sense; of reason afterwards. That instant wherein the heaven and the earth were created in their rude matter, there was neither day nor light: but presently thou madest both light and day. While we have this example of thine, how vainly do we hope to be perfect at once! It is well for us, if, through many degrees, we can rise to our consummation.

But, alas! what was the very heaven itself without light? How confused! how formless; like to a goodly body without a soul, like a soul without thee. Thou art light, and in thee is no darkness, Oh! how incomprehensibly glorious is the light that is in thee, since one glimpse of this created light gave so lively a glory to all thy workmanship! This even the brute creatures can behold! that, not the very angels,—that shines forth only to the other supreme world of immortality; this to the basest part of thy creation. There is one cause of our darkness on earth and of the utter darkness of hell;—the restraint of thy light. Shine thou, O God, into the vast corners of my soul, and in thy light I shall see light.

But whence, O God, was that first light? The sun was not made till the fourth day—light the first. If man had been, he might have seen all lightsome; but, whence it had come, he could not have seen; as, in some great pond, we see the banks full; we see not the springs from whence the water ariseth. Thou madest the sun; madest the light without the sun, before the sun, that so light might depend upon thee, and not upon thy creature. Thy power will not be limited to means. It was easy to thee to make an heaven without sun, light without an heaven, day without a sun, time without a day. It is good reason thou shouldst be the Lord of thine own works. All means serve thee: why do we, weak wretches, distrust thee, in the want of those means which thou canst either command or forbear? How plainly wouldst thou teach us, that we creatures need not one another, so long as we have thee! One day we shall have light again, without the sun: Thou shalt be our sun: thy presence shall be our light: "Light is sown for the righteous." The sun and light is but for the world below itself; thine only for above. Thou givest this light to the sun, which the sun gives to the world: that light which thou shalt once give us, shall make us shine like the sun in glory.

Now this light, which for three days was thus dispersed through the whole heavens, it pleased thee, at last, to gather and unite into one body of the sun. The whole heaven was our sun, before the sun was created: but now one star must be the treasury of light to the heaven and earth. How thou lovest the union and reduction of all things of one kind to their own head and centre! so the waters must, by thy command, be gathered into one place, the sea: so the upper waters must be severed by these airy limits from the lower: so heavy substances hasten downward, and light mount up: so the general light of the first days, must be called into the compass of one sun: so thou wilt once gather thine elect from all coasts of heaven, to the participation of one glory. Why do we abide our thoughts and affections scattered from thee, from thy saints, from thine anointed? Oh! let this light, which thou hast now spread abroad in the hearts of all thine, once meet in thee. We are as thy heavens, in this their first imperfection; be thou our sun, unto which our light may be gathered.

Yet this light was by thee interchanged with darkness, which thou mightest as easily have commanded to be perpetual. The continuance, even of the best things, cloyeth and wearieth: there is nothing but thyself, wherein there is not satiety. So pleasing is the vicissitude of things, that the intercourse even of those occurrents, which in their own nature are less worthy, gives more contentment than the unaltered estate of better. The day dies into night, and rises into the morning again, that we might not expect any stability here below, but in perpetual successions. It is always day with thee above: the night savoureth only of mortality.

Why are we not here spiritually, as we shall be hereafter? Since thou hast made us children of the light, and of the day, teach us to walk ever in the light of thy presence, not in the darkness of error and unbelief.

Now, in this thine enlightened frame, how fitly, how wisely are all the parts disposed; that the method of the creation might answer the matter and the form both! Behold all purity above; below, the dregs and lees of all. The higher I go, the more perfection; each element superior to other, not more in place than dignity; that, by these stairs of ascending perfection, our thoughts might climb unto the top of all glory, and might know thine imperial heaven, no less glorious above the visible than those above the earth. Oh! how miserable is the place of our pilgrimage, in respect of our home! Let my soul tread awhile in the steps of thine own proceedings; and so sink as thou wroughtest. When we would describe a man, we begin not at the feet, but the head. The head of thy creation is the heaven; how high! how spacious! how glorious! It is a wonder that we can look up to so admirable a height, and that the very eye is not tired in the way. If this ascending line could be drawn right forwards, some, that have calculated curiously, have found it five hundred years' journey unto the starry heaven. I do not examine their art; O Lord, I wonder rather at thine, which hast drawn so large a line about this little point of earth: for, in the plainest rules of art and experience, the compass must needs be six times as much as half the height. We think one island great, but the earth immeasurably. If we were in that heaven, with these eyes, the whole earth (were it equally enlightened) would seem as little to us, as now the least star in the firmament seems to us upon earth: and, indeed, how few stars are so little as it? And yet, how many void and ample spaces are there beside all the stars? The hugeness of this thy work, O God, is little inferior for admiration to the majesty of it. But, oh, what a glorious heaven is this which thou hast spread over our heads! With how precious a vault hast thou walled in this our inferior world! What worlds of light hast thou set above us! Those things which we see are wondrous; but those, which we believe and see not, are yet more. Thou dost but set out these unto view, to show us what there is within. How proportionable are thy works to thyself! Kings erect not cottages, but set forth their magnificence in sumptuous buildings; so hast thou done, O King of Glory! If the lowest pavement of that heaven of thine be so glorious, what shall we think of the better parts yet unseen? And if this sun of thine be of such brightness and majesty, oh! what is the glory of the Maker of it? And yet if some other of thy stars were let down as low as it, those other stars would be suns to us; which now thou hadst rather to have admired in their distance. And if such a sky be prepared for the use and benefit even of thine enemies also upon earth, how happy shall those eternal tabernacles be, which thou hast sequestered for thine own?

Behold then in this high and stately building of thine, I see three stages: this lowest heaven for fowls, for vapours, for meteors: the second, for the stars: the third for thine angels and saints. The first is thine outward court, open for all: the second is the body of thy covered temple, wherein are those candles of heaven perpetually burning: the third is thine holy of holies. In the first is tumult and vanity: in the second, immutability and rest: in the third, glory and blessedness. The first we feel, the second we see, the third we believe. In these two lower is no felicity; for neither the fowls nor stars are happy. It is the third heaven alone, where thou, O blessed Trinity! enjoyest thyself, and thy glorified spirits enjoy thee. It is the manifestation of thy glorious presence, that makes heaven to be itself. This is the privilege of thy children, that they here, seeing thee (which art invisible) by the eye of faith, have already begun that heaven, which the perfect sight of thee shall make perfect above. Let my soul then let these heavens alone, till it may see as it is seen. That we may descend to this lowest and meanest region of heaven, wherewith our senses are more acquainted; what marvels do even here meet with us? There are thy clouds, thy bottles of rain, vessels as thin as the liquor which is contained in them: there they hang and move, though weighty with their burden: how they are upheld, and why they fall, here, and now, we know not, and wonder. Those thou makest one while, as some airy seas, to hold water: another while as some airy furnaces, whence thou scatterest thy sudden fires unto all the parts of the earth, astonishing the world with the fearful noise of that eruption: out of the midst of water thou fetchest fire, and hard stones out of the midst of thin vapours: another while, as some steel-glasses, wherein the sun looks, and shows his face in the variety of those colours which he hath not; there are thy streams of light, blazing and falling stars, fires darted up and down in many forms, hollow openings, and (as it were) gulfs in the sky, bright circles about the moon and other planets, snows, hail: in all which it is enough to admire thine hand, though we cannot search out thine action. There are thy subtile winds, which we hear and feel, yet neither can see their substance, nor know their causes; whence, and whither they pass, and what they are, thou knowest. There are thy fowls of all shapes, colours, notes, natures: whilst I compare these with the inhabitants of that other heaven, I find those stars and spirits like one another; these meteors and fowls, in as many varieties as there are several creatures. Why is this? Is it because Man (for whose sake these are made) delights in change, thou in constancy? or is it, that in these thou mayest show thine own skill, and their imperfection? There is no variety in that which is perfect, because there is but one perfection; and so much shall we grow nearer to perfectness, by how much we draw nearer to unity and uniformity. From thence, if we go down to the great deep, the womb of moisture, the well of fountains, the great pond of the world; we know not whether to wonder at the element itself, or the guests which it contains. How doth that sea of thine roar and foam, and swell, as if it would swallow up the earth? Thou stayest the rage of it by an insensible violence: and, by a natural miracle, confinest his waves; why it moves, and why it stays, it is to us equally wonderful: what living mountains (such are thy whales) roll up and down in those fearful billows: for greatness of number, hugeness of quantity, strangeness of shapes, variety of fashions, neither air nor earth can compare with the waters. I say nothing of thy hid treasures, which thy wisdom hath reposed in the bowels of the earth and sea: how secretly and how basely are they laid up! secretly, that we might not seek them; basely, that we might not over-esteem them: I need not dig so low as these metals, mineries, quarries which yield riches enough of observation to the soul. How many millions of wonders doth the very face of the earth offer me? Which of these herbs, flowers, trees, leaves, seeds, fruits, is there; what beast, what worm, wherein we may not see the footsteps of a Deity, wherein we may not read infiniteness of power, of skill, and must be forced to confess, that he which made the angels and stars of heaven, made also the vermin on the earth? O God, the heart of man is too strait to admire enough even that which he treads upon! What shall we say to thee, the Maker of all these? O Lord, how wonderful are thy works in all the world! in wisdom hast thou made them all: and in all these thou spakest, and they were done. Thy will is thy word, and thy word is thy deed. Our tongue, and hand, and heart are different: all are one in thee, which are simply one, and infinite. Here needed no helps, no instruments: what could be present with the Eternal? What needed, or what could be added to the Infinite? Thine hand is not shortened, thy word is still equally effectual: say thou the word, and my soul shall be made new again; say thou the word, and my body shall be repaired from his dust: for all things obey thee. O Lord, why do I not yield to the word of thy counsel; since I must yield, as all thy creatures, to the word of thy command?

CONTEMPLATION II.—OF MAN.

But, O God! what a little lord hast thou made over this great world? The least corn of sand is not so small to the whole earth, as man is to the heaven. When I see the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars, O God, what is man? Who would think thou shouldst make all these creatures for one, and that one well-near the last of all? Yet none but he can see what thou hast done; none but he can admire and adore thee in what he seeth: How had he need to do nothing but this, since he alone must do it! Certainly the price and virtue of things consist not in the quantity: one diamond is worth more than many quarries of stone; one loadstone hath more virtue than mountains of earth. It is lawful for us to praise thee in ourselves. All thy creation hath not more wonder in it, than one of us: other creatures thou madest by a simple command; Man, not without a divine consultation;—others at once; man thou didst first form, then inspire:—others in several shapes, like to none but themselves; man, after thine own image:—others with qualities fit for service; man, for dominion. Man had his name from thee; they had their names from man. How should we be consecrated to thee above all others, since thou hast bestowed more cost on us than others! What shall I admire first? thy providence in the time of our creation; or thy power and wisdom in the act? First, thou madest the great house of the world, and furnishedst it; then thou broughtest in thy tenant to possess it. The bare walls had been too good for us, but thy love was above our desert: thou, that madest ready the earth for us before we were, hast, by the same mercy, prepared a place in heaven for us, while we are on earth. The stage was first fully prepared, then was man brought forth thither, as an actor, or spectator, that he might neither be idle nor discontent. Behold, thou hadst addressed an earth for use, an heaven for contemplation. After thou hadst drawn that large and real map of the world, thou didst thus abridge it into this little table of man: he alone consists of heaven and earth, soul and body. Even this earthly part, which is vile in comparison of the other, as it is thine, O God, I dare admire it, though I can neglect it as mine own; for, lo! this heap of earth hath an outward reference to heaven. Other creatures grovel down to their earth, and have all their senses intent upon it; this is reared up towards heaven, and hath no more power to look beside heaven, than to tread beside the earth. Unto this, every part hath his wonder. The head is nearest to heaven, as in place, so in resemblance, both for roundness of figure, and for those divine guests which have their seat in it: There dwell those majestical powers of reason, which make a man; all the senses, as they have their original from thence, so they do all agree there to manifest the virtue. How goodly proportions hast thou set in the face! such as, though ofttimes we can give no reason when they please, yet transport us to admiration. What living glasses are those which thou hast placed in the midst of this visage, whereby all objects from far are clearly represented to the mind! and because their tenderness lies open to dangers, how hast thou defenced them with hollow bones, and with prominent brows, and lids! and lest they should be too much bent on what they ought not, thou hast given them peculiar nerves to pull them up towards the seat of their rest. What a tongue hast thou given him; the instrument not of taste only, but of speech! how sweet and excellent voices are formed by that little loose film of flesh! what an incredible strength hast thou given to the weak bones of the jaws! what a comely and tower-like neck, therefore most sinewy because smallest! and lest I be infinite, what able arms and active hands hast thou framed him, whereby he can frame all things to his own conceit! In every part, beauty, strength, convenience meet together. Neither is there any whereof our weakness cannot give reason why it should be no otherwise. How hast thou disposed of all the inward vessels, for all offices of life, nourishment, digestion, generation! No vein, sinew, artery is idle. There is no piece in this exquisite frame, whereof the place, use, form, doth not admit wonder, and exceed it. Yet this body, if it be compared to the soul, what is it, but as a clay wall that encompasses a treasure; as a wooden box of a jeweller; as a coarse case to a rich instrument; or as a mask to a beautiful face? Man was made last, because he was worthiest. The soul was inspired last, because yet more noble. If the body have this honour to be the companion of the soul, yet withal it is the drudge. If it be the instrument, yet also the clog of that divine part, the companion for life, the drudge for service, the instrument for action, the clog in respect of contemplation. These external works are effected by it; the internal, which are more noble, hindered; contrary to the bird which sings most in her cage, but flies most and highest, at liberty. This my soul teaches me of itself, that itself cannot conceive, how capable, how active it is. I can pass by her nimble thoughts from heaven to earth in a moment: it can be all things, can comprehend all things; know that which is, and conceive that which never was, never shall be. Nothing can fill it, but thou which art infinite; nothing can limit it, but thou which art everywhere. O God, which madest it, replenish it, possess it, dwell thou in it, which hast appointed it to dwell in clay. The body was made of earth common to his fellows; the soul inspired immediately from God. The body lay senseless upon the earth like itself: the breath of lives gave it what it is, and that breath was from thee. Sense, motion, reason, are infused into it at once. From whence then was this quickening breath? No air, no earth, no water was here used to give help to this work. Thou that breathest upon man, and gavest him the Holy Spirit, didst also breathe upon the body, and gavest it a living spirit. We are beholden to nothing but thee for our soul. Our flesh is from flesh; our spirit is from the God of spirits. How should our souls rise up to thee, and fix themselves in their thoughts upon thee, who alone created them in their infusion, and infused them in their creation? How should they long to return back to the fountain of their being, and author of being glorious? Why may we not say, that this soul, as it came from thee, so it is like thee? As thou, so it is one, immaterial, immortal, understanding spirit, distinguished into three powers, which all make up one spirit. So thou, the wise Creator of all things, wouldst have some things to resemble their Creator. These other creatures are all body; man is body and spirit. The angels are all spirit, not without a kind of spiritual composition; thou art alone after thine own manner, simple, glorious, infinite: no creature can be like thee in thy proper being, because it is a creature. How should our finite, weak, compounded nature, give any perfect resemblance of thine? Yet of all visible creatures, thou vouchsafest man the nearest correspondence to thee: not so much in the natural faculties, as in those divine graces, wherewith thou beautifiest his soul.

Our knowledge, holiness, righteousness, was like the first copy from which they were drawn. Behold, we were not more like thee in these, than now we are unlike ourselves in their loss. O God, we now praise ourselves to our shame, for the better we were, we are the worse; as the sons of some prodigal, or tainted ancestors, tell of the lands and lordships which were once theirs. Only do they whet our desires, answerably to the readiness of thy mercies, that we may redeem what we have lost; that we may recover in thee, what we have lost in ourselves. The fault shall be ours, if our damage prove not beneficial.

I do not find that man, thus framed, found the want of an helper. His fruition of God gave him fulness of contentment: the sweetness which he found in the contemplation of this new workmanship, and the glory of the Author, did so take him up, that he had neither leisure nor cause of complaint. If man had craved an helper, he had grudged at the condition of his creation, and had questioned that which he had, perfection of being. But he that gave him his being, and knew him better than himself, thinks of giving him comfort in the creature, while he sought none but in his Maker. He sees our wants, and forecasts our relief, when we think ourselves too happy to complain. How ready will he be to help our necessities, that thus provides for our perfection!

God gives the nature to his creatures, man must give the name; that he might see they were made for him, they shall be to him what he will. Instead of their first homage, they are presented to their new lord, and must see of whom they hold. He that was so careful of man's sovereignty in his innocence, how can he be careless of his safety in his renovation?

If God hath given them their names, it had not been so great a praise of Adam's memory to recall them, as it was now of his judgment (at first sight) to impose them: he saw the inside of all the creatures at first, (his posterity sees but their skins ever since;) and by this knowledge he fitted their names to their dispositions. All that he saw were fit to be his servants, none to be his companions. The same God that finds the want, supplies it. Rather than man's innocency shall want an outward comfort, God will begin a new creation: not out of the earth, which was the matter of man; not out of the inferior creatures, which were the servants of man; but out of himself, for dearness, for equality. Doubtless, such was man's power of obedience, that if God had bidden him yield up his rib, waking, for his use, he had done it cheerfully: but the bounty of God was so absolute, that he would not so much as consult with man's will, to make him happy. As man knew not while he was made, so shall he not know while his other self is made out of him: that the comfort might be greater, which was seen before it was expected.

If the woman should have been made, not without the pain or will of the man, she might have been upbraided with her dependence and obligation. Now she owes nothing but to her Creator; the rib of Adam sleeping can challenge no more of her than the earth can of him. It was an happy change to Adam of a rib for an helper; what help did that bone give to his side! God had not made it, if it had been superfluous: and yet if man could not have been perfect without it, it had not been taken out.

Many things are useful and convenient, which are not necessary; and if God had seen man might not want it, how easy had it been for him, which made the woman of that bone, to turn the flesh into another bone! but he saw man could not complain of the want of that bone, which he had so multiplied, so animated.

O God, we can never be losers by thy changes; we have nothing but what is thine. Take from us thine own, when thou wilt: we are sure thou canst not but give us better.

CONTEMPLATION III.—OF PARADISE.

MAN could no sooner see, than he saw himself happy: his eye-sight and reason were both perfect at once, and the objects of both were able to make him as happy as he would. When he first opened his eyes, he saw heaven above him, earth under him, the creatures around him, God before him; he knew what all these things meant, as if he had been long acquainted with them all. He saw the heavens glorious, but afar off: his Maker thought it requisite to fit him with a paradise nearer home. If God had appointed him immediately to heaven, his body had been superfluous; it was fit his body should be answered with an earthen image of that heaven, which was for his soul. Had man been made only for contemplation, it would have served as well to have been placed in some vast desert, on the top of some barren mountain; but the same power which gave him a heart to meditate, gave him hands to work, and work fit for his hands. Neither was it the purpose of the Creator, that man should but live. Pleasure may stand with innocence. He that rejoiced to see all he had made to be good, rejoiceth to see all that he hath made to be well. God loves to see his creatures happy; our lawful delight is his: they know not God, that think to please him with making themselves miserable.

The idolaters thought it a fit service for Baal, to cut and lance themselves: never any holy man looked for thanks from the true God by wronging himself. Every earth was not fit for Adam, but a garden, a paradise. What excellent pleasures, and rare varieties have men found in gardens, planted by the hands of men! and yet all the world of men cannot make one twig, or leaf, or spire of grass. When he that made the matter undertakes the fashion, how must it needs be, beyond our capacity, excellent! No herb, no flower, no tree was wanting there, that might be for ornament or use; whether for sight, or for scent, or for taste. The bounty of God taught further than to necessity, even to comfort and recreation: Why are we niggardly to ourselves, when God is liberal? but for all this, if God had not there conversed with man, no abundance could have made him blessed.

Yet, behold! that which was man's store-house, was also his workhouse; his pleasure was his task: paradise served not only to feed his senses, but to exercise his hands. If happiness had consisted in doing nothing, man had not been employed; all his delights could not have made him happy in an idle life. Man therefore is no sooner made, than he is set to work: neither greatness nor perfection can privilege a folded hand; he must labour because he was happy; how much more we, that we may be! This first labour of his was, as without necessity, so without pains, without weariness: How much more cheerfully we go about our businesses, so much nearer we come to our paradise.

Neither did these trees afford him only action for his hands, but instruction to his heart; for here he saw God's sacraments grow before him; all other trees had a natural use, these two in the midst of the garden a spiritual. Life is the act of the soul, knowledge the life of the soul; the tree of knowledge, and the tree of life, then were ordained as earthly helps of the spiritual part. Perhaps he which ordained the end, immortality of life, did appoint this fruit as the means of that life. It is not for us to inquire after the life we had, and the means we should have had. I am sure it served to nourish the soul by a lively representation of that living tree, whose fruit is eternal life, and whose leaves serve to heal the nations.

O infinite mercy! man saw his Saviour before him, ere he had need of a Saviour: he saw in whom he should recover an heavenly life, ere he lost the earthly. But after he had tasted of the tree of knowledge, he might not taste of the tree of life; that immortal food was not for a mortal stomach: yet then did he most favour that invisible tree of life, when he was most restrained from the other.

O Saviour! none but a sinner can relish thee; my taste hath been enough seasoned with the forbidden fruit, to make it capable of thy sweetness; sharpen thou as well the stomach of my soul by repenting; by believing, so shall I eat, and, in despite of Adam, live for ever. The one tree was for confirmation, the other for trial: one showed him what life he should have, the other what knowledge he should not desire to have; Alas! he that knew all other things, knew not this one thing, that he knew enough: how divine a thing is knowledge, whereof ever innocency itself is ambitious! Satan knew what he did: if this bait had been gold, or honour, or pleasure, man had contemned; who can hope to avoid error, when even man's perfection is mistaken? He looked for speculative knowledge, he should have looked for experimental; he thought it had been good to know evil! good was large enough to have perfected his knowledge, and therein his blessedness.

All that God made was good, and the Maker of them much more good; they good in their kinds, he good in himself. It would not content him to know God and his creatures; his curiosity affected to know that which God never made, evil of sin, and evil of death, which indeed himself made by desiring to know them: now we know evil well enough, and smart with knowing it. How dear hath this lesson cost us, that in some cases it is better to be ignorant! and yet do the sons of Eve inherit this saucy appetite of their grandmother; how many thousand souls miscarry with the presumptuous affectation of forbidden knowledge!

O God, thou hast revealed more than we can know, enough to make us happy; teach me a sober knowledge, and a contented ignorance.

Paradise was made for man, yet there I see the serpent: what marvel is it, if my corruption find the serpent in my closet, in my table, in my bed, when our holy parents found him in the midst of paradise? No sooner he is entered, but he tempteth: he can no more be idle, than harmless. I do not see him at any other tree; he knew there was no danger in the rest; I see him at the tree forbidden. How true a serpent he is in every point! in his insinuation to the place, in his choice of the tree, in his assault of the woman, in his plausibleness of speech to avoid terror, in his question to move doubt, in his reply to work distrust, in his protestation of safety, in his suggestion to envy and discontent, in his promise of gain.

And if he was so cunning at the first, what shall we think of him now, after so many thousand years' experience? Only thou, O God! and these angels that see thy face, are wiser than he. I do not ask why, when he left his goodness, thou didst not bereave him of his skill? Still thou wouldst have him an angel, though an evil one: and thou knowest how to ordain his craft to thine own glory. I do not desire thee to abate of his subtilty, but to make me wise: let me beg it, without presumption, make me wiser than Adam; even thine image which he bore, made him not (through his own weakness) wise enough to obey thee; thou offeredst him all fruits, and restrainedst but one; Satan offered him but one, and restrained not the rest. When he chose rather to be at Satan's feeding than thine, it was just with thee to turn him out of thy gates with a curse: why shouldst thou feed a rebel at thine own board?

And yet we transgress daily, and thou shuttest not heaven against us: how is it that we find more mercy than our forefather? His strength is worthy of severity, our weakness finds pity. That God from whose face he fled in the garden, now makes him with shame to flee out of the garden: those angels that should have kept him, now keep the gates of paradise against him. It is not so easy to recover happiness, as to keep it or lose it; yea, the same cause that drave man from paradise hath also withdrawn paradise from the world.

That fiery sword did not defend it against those waters wherewith the sins of men drowned the glory of that place: neither now do I care to seek where that paradise was which we lost: I know where that paradise is, which we must care to seek, and hope to find. As man was the image of God, so was that earthly paradise an image of heaven; both the images are defaced, both the first parents are eternal: Adam was in the first, and staid not: in the second, is the second Adam, which said, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." There was that chosen vessel, and heard and saw what could not be expressed: by how much the third heaven exceeds the richest earth; so much doth that paradise, whereto we aspire, exceed that which we have lost.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—OF CAIN AND ABEL.

Look now, O my soul! upon the two first brethren, perhaps twins, and wonder at their contrary dispositions and estates. If the privileges of nature had been worth any thing, the first-born child should not have been a reprobate.

Now, that we may ascribe all to free grace, the elder is a murderer, the younger a saint: though goodness may be repaired in ourselves, yet it cannot be propagated to ours: now might Adam see the image of himself in Cain, for after his own image begot he him; Adam slew his posterity, Cain his brother. We are too like one another, in that wherein we are unlike to God: even the clearest grain sends forth that chaff from which it was fanned ere the sowing: yet is this Cain a possession. The same Eve that mistook the fruit of the garden, mistook also the fruit of her own body, her hope deceived her in both; so, many good names are ill bestowed; and our comfortable expectations in earthly things do not seldom disappoint us.

Doubtless their education was holy; for Adam, though in paradise he could not be innocent, yet was a good man out of paradise; his sin and fall now made him circumspect; and since he saw that his act had bereaved them of that image of God, which he once had for them, he could not but labour, by all holy endeavours, to repair it in them, that so his care might make amends for his trespass. How plain is it, that even good breeding cannot alter destiny! That which is crooked, can none make straight; who would think that brethren, and but two brethren, should not love each other? Dispersed love grows weak, and fewness of objects useth to unite affections: if but two brothers be left alive of many, they think that the love of all the rest should survive in them; and now the beams of their affection are so much the hotter, because they reflect mutually in a right line upon each other: yet behold, here are but two brothers in a world, and one is the butcher of the other. Who can wonder at dissensions among thousands of brethren, when he sees so deadly opposition betwixt two, the first roots of brotherhood? Who can hope to live plausibly and securely amongst so many Cains, when he sees one Cain the death of one Abel? The same devil that set enmity betwixt man and God, sets enmity betwixt man and man; and yet God said, "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed." Our hatred of the serpent and his seed is from God: their hatred of the holy seed is from the serpent: behold here at once, in one person, the seed of the woman and of the serpent; Cain's natural parts are of the woman, his vicious qualities of the serpent: the woman gave him to be a brother, the serpent to be a manslayer; all uncharitableness, all quarrels are of one author: we cannot entertain wrath, and not give place to the devil. Certainly so deadly an act must needs be deeply grounded.

What then was the occasion of this capital malice? Abel's sacrifice is accepted; what was this to Cain? Cain's is rejected; what could Abel remedy this? O envy! the corrosive of all ill minds, and the root of all desperate actions. The same cause that moved Satan to tempt the first man to destroy himself and his posterity, the same moves the second man to destroy the third.

It should have been Cain's joy to see his brother accepted; it should have been his sorrow to see that himself had deserved a rejection; his brother's example should have excited and directed him. Could Abel have staid God's fire from descending? or should he (if he could) reject God's acceptation, and displease his Maker to content a brother? Was Cain ever the farther from a blessing, because his brother obtained mercy? How proud and foolish is malice! which grows thus mad for no other cause but because God or Abel is not less good. It hath been an old and happy danger to be holy; indifferent actions must be careful to avoid offence; but I care not what devil or what Cain be angry that I do good, or receive good.

There was never any nature without envy: every man is born a Cain, hating that goodness in another which he neglected in himself. There was never envy that was not bloody; for if it eat not another's heart, it will eat our own; but unless it be restrained, it will surely feed itself with the blood of others, ofttimes in act, always in affection. And that God, which (in good) accepts the will for the deed, condemns the will for the deed in evil. If there be an evil heart, there will be an evil eye; and if both these, there will be an evil hand.

How early did martyrdom come into the world! The first man that died, died for religion: who dare measure God's love by outward events, when he sees wicked Cain standing over bleeding Abel, whose sacrifice was first accepted, and now himself is sacrificed! Death was denounced to man as a curse; yet, behold! it first lights upon a saint: how soon was it altered by the mercy of that just hand which inflicted it! If death had been evil, and life good, Cain had been slain, and Abel had survived. Now that it begins with him that God loves, "O death, where is thy sting!"

Abel says nothing—his blood cries. Every drop of innocent blood hath a tongue, and is not only vocal, but importunate. What a noise, then, did the blood of my Saviour make in heaven, who was himself the shepherd and the sacrifice, the man that was offered, and the God to whom it was offered! The Spirit that heard both, says, "It spake better things than the blood of Abel." Abel's blood called for revenge—his for mercy: Abel's pleaded his own innocency—his the satisfaction for all the believing world: Abel's procured Cain's punishment—his freed all repentant souls from punishment; better things indeed than the blood of Abel; better, and therefore that which Abel's blood said was good. It is good that God should be avenged of sinners. Execution of justice upon offenders is no less good than rewards of goodness.

No sooner doth Abel's blood speak unto God, than God speaks to Cain. There is no wicked man to whom God speaks not, if not to his ear, yet to his heart. What speech was this? Not an accusation, but an inquiry; yet such an inquiry as would infer an accusation. God loves to have a sinner accuse himself; and therefore hath he set his deputy in the breast of man: neither doth God love this more than nature abhors it. Cain answers stubbornly: the very name of Abel wounds him no less than his hand had wounded Abel: consciences that are without remorse, are not without horror: wickedness makes men desperate. The murderer is angry with God, as of late, for accepting his brother's oblation; so now, for listening to his blood.

And now he dares answer God with a question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" where he should have said, Am not I my brother's murderer? Behold, he scorneth to keep whom he feared not to kill. Good duties are base and troublesome to wicked minds, while even violences of evil are pleasant. Yet this miscreant, which neither had grace to avoid his sin nor to confess it, now that he is convinced of sin, and cursed for it, how he howleth, how he exclaimeth! He that cares not for the act of his sin, shall care for the smart of his punishment. The damned are weary of their torments, but in vain. How great a madness is it to complain too late! He that would not keep his brother, is cast out from the protection of God; he that feared not to kill his brother, fears now that whosoever meets him will kill him. The troubled conscience projecteth fearful things, and sin makes even cruel men cowardly. God saw it was too much favour for him to die; he therefore wills that which Cain wills. Cain would live; it is yielded him, but for a curse. How often doth God hear sinners in anger! He shall live, banished from God, carrying his hell in his bosom, and the brand of God's vengeance in his forehead. God objects him, the earth repines at him, men abhor him; himself now wishes that death which he feared, and no man dare pleasure him with a murder. How bitter is the end of sin, yea, without end! Still Cain finds that he killed himself more than his brother. We should never sin if our foresight were but as good as our sense; the issue of sin would appear a thousand times more horrible than the act is pleasant.

CONTEMPLATION V.—OF THE DELUGE.

THE world was grown so foul with sin, that God saw it was time to wash it with a flood: and so close did wickedness cleave to the authors of it, that when they were washed to nothing, yet it would not off; yea, so deep did it stick in the very grain of the earth, that God saw it meet to let it soak long under the waters. So, under the law, the very vessels that had touched unclean water, must either be rinsed or broken. Mankind began but with one; and yet he that saw the first man, lived to see the earth peopled with a world of men; yet man grew not so fast as wickedness. One man could soon and easily multiply a thousand sins —never man had so many children: so that when there were men enough to store the earth, there were as many sins as would reach up to heaven; whereupon the waters came down from heaven, and swelled up to heaven again. If there had not been so deep a deluge of sin, there had been none of the waters; from whence, then, was this superfluity of iniquity? Whence but from the unequal yoke with infidels? These marriages did not beget men so much as wickedness; from hence religious husbands both lost their piety, and gained a rebellious and godless generation.

That which was the first occasion of sin, was the occasion of the increase of sin: A woman seduced Adam—women betrayed the sons of God: the beauty of the apple betrayed the woman; the beauty of these women betrayed this holy seed: Eve saw, and lusted—so did they; this also was a forbidden fruit—they lusted, tasted, sinned, died. The most sins begin at the eyes; by them commonly Satan creeps into the heart. that soul can never be in safety that hath not covenanted with his eyes.

God needed not have given these men any warning of his judgment; they gave him no warning of their sins, no respite; yet that God might approve his mercies to the very wicked, he gives them an hundred and twenty years' respite of repenting. How loath is God to strike, that threats so long! He that delights in revenge, surprises his adversary; whereas he that gives long warnings desires to be prevented. If we were not wilful we should never smart.

Neither doth he give them time only, but a faithful teacher. It is an happy thing when he that teacheth others is righteous. Noah's hand taught them as much as his tongue. His business in building the ark was a real sermon to the world, wherein at once were taught mercy and life to the believer, and to the rebellious, destruction.

Methinks I see those monstrous sons of Lamech coming to Noah, and asking him what he means by that strange work? whether he meant to sail upon the dry land? To whom when he reports God's purpose and his, they go away laughing at his idleness, and tell one another in sport, that too much holiness hath made him mad: yet cannot they all flout Noah out of his faith; he preaches, and builds, and finishes. Doubtless more hands went to this work than his. Many a one wrought upon the ark, which yet was not saved in the ark. Our outward works cannot save us without our faith: we may help to save others, and perish ourselves. What a wonder of mercy is this that I here see! One poor family called out of a world, and, as it were, eight grains of corn fanned from a whole barnful of chaff. One hypocrite was saved with the rest, for Noah's sake; not one righteous man was swept away for company: for these few was the earth preserved still under the waters, and all kinds of creatures upon the waters; which else had been all destroyed Still the world stands for their sakes for whom it was preserved, else fire should consume that which could not be cleansed by water.

This difference is strange; I see the savagest of all creatures, lions, tigers, bears, by an instinct from God, come to seek the ark, (as we see swine, foreseeing a storm, run home crying for shelter)—men I see not: reason once debauched is worse than brutishness. God hath use even of these fierce and cruel beasts, and glory by them; even they, being created for man, must live by him, though to his punishment. How gently do they offer and submit themselves to their preserver; renewing that obeisance to this repairer of the world, which they, before sin, yielded to him that first stored the world. He that shut them into the ark when they were entered, shut their mouths also when they did enter. The lions fawn upon Noah and Daniel. What heart cannot the Maker of them mollify!

The unclean beasts God would have to live, the clean to multiply; and therefore he sends to Noah seven of the clean, of the unclean two. He knew the one would annoy man with their multitude, the other would enrich him. Those things are worthy of most respect, which are of most use.

But why seven? Surely that God, that created seven days in the week, and made one for himself, did here preserve, of seven clean beasts, one for himself for sacrifice. He gives us six for one in earthly things, that in spiritual we should be all for him.

Now the day is come, all the guests are entered, the ark is shut, and the windows of heaven opened. I doubt not but many of those scoffers, when they saw the violence of the waves descending and ascending, according to Noah's prediction, came wading middle-deep unto the ark, and importunately craved that admittance which they once denied; but now, as they formerly rejected God, so are they justly rejected of God. Ere vengeance begin, repentance is seasonable; but if judgment be once gone out, we cry too late. While the gospel solicits us, the doors of the ark are open; if we neglect the time of grace, in vain shall we seek it with tears. God holds it no mercy to pity the obstinate. Others, more bold than they, hope to overrun the judgment; and, climbing up to the high mountains, look down upon the waters with more hope than fear. And now when they see their hills become islands, they climb up into the tallest trees; there with paleness and horror at once look for death, and study to avoid it, whom the waves overtake at last, half dead with famine and half with fear. Lo! now from the tops of the mountains they descry the ark floating upon the waters, and behold with envy that which before they beheld with scorn.

In vain doth he fly whom God pursues. There is no way to fly from his judgments, but to fly to his mercy by repentance. The faith of the righteous cannot be so much derided, as their success is magnified. How securely doth Noah ride out this uproar of heaven, earth, and waters! He hears the pouring down of the rain above his head; the shrieking of men, and roaring and bellowing of beasts on both sides of him; the raging and threats of the waves under him; he saw the miserable shifts of the distressed unbelievers; and, in the meantime, sits quietly in his dry cabin, neither feeling nor fearing evil. He knew that he which owned the waters would steer him; that he who shut him in would preserve him. How happy a thing is faith! what a quiet safety, what an heavenly peace doth it work in the soul, in the midst of all the inundation of evil!

Now, when God hath fetched again all the life which he had given to his unworthy creatures, and reduced the world unto his first form, wherein waters were over the face of the earth, it was time for a renovation of all things to succeed this destruction. To have continued this deluge long, had been to punish Noah that was righteous. After forty days, therefore, the heavens clear up; after an hundred and fifty the waters sink down. How soon is God weary of punishing, which is never weary of blessing! But may not the ark rest suddenly? If we did not stay some while under God's hand, we should not know how sweet his mercy is, and how great our thankfulness should be. The ark, though it was Noah's fort against the waters, yet it was his prison; he was safe in it, but pent up: he that gave him life by it, now thinks time to give him liberty out of it.

God doth not reveal all things to his best servants. Behold, he that told Noah an hundred and twenty years before what day he should go into the ark, yet foretells him not now in the ark what day the ark should rest upon the hills, and he should go forth. Noah, therefore, sends out his intelligencers, the raven and the dove, whose wings in that vaporous air might easily descry further than his sight. The raven, of quick scent, of gross feed, of tough constitution; no fowl was so fit for discovery: the likeliest things always succeed not. He neither will venture far into that solitary world for fear of want, nor yet come into the ark for love of liberty, but hovers about in uncertainties. How many carnal minds fly out of the ark of God's church and embrace the present world: rather choosing to feed upon the unsavoury carcasses of sinful pleasures, than to be restrained within the straight lists of Christian obedience!

The dove is sent forth, a fowl both swift and simple. She, like a true citizen of the ark, returns, and brings faithful notice of the continuance of the waters, by her restless and empty return; by her olive-leaf, of the abatement. How worthy are those messengers to be welcome, which with innocence in their lives, bring glad tidings of peace and salvation in their mouths!

Noah rejoices and believes; yet still he waits seven days more. It is not good to devour the favours of God too greedily; but so take them in, that we may digest them. O strong faith of Noah, that was not weary with this delay! Some men would have so longed for the open air, after so long closeness, that, upon the first notice of safety, he would have uncovered and voided the ark. Noah stays seven days ere he will open, and well-near two months ere he will forsake the ark; and not then unless God that commanded to enter, had bidden him depart. There is no action good without faith; no faith without a word. Happy is that man which in all things (neglecting the counsels of flesh and blood) depends upon the commission of his Maker.

BOOK II.

CONTEMPLATION I.—OF NOAH.

No sooner is Noah come out of the ark, but he builds an altar: not an house for himself, but an altar to the Lord. Our faith will ever teach us to prefer God to ourselves; delayed thankfulness is not worthy of acceptation. Of those few creatures that are left, God must have some; they are all his: yet his goodness will have man know that it was he, for whose sake they were preserved. It was a privilege to those very brute creatures, that they were saved from the waters, to be offered up in fire unto God. What a favour is it to men, to be reserved from common destructions, to be sacrificed to their Maker and Redeemer.

Lo, this little fire of Noah, through the virtue of his faith, purged the world, and ascended up into those heavens from which the waters fell, and caused a glorious rainbow to appear therein for his security; all the sins of the former world were not so unsavoury unto God, as this smoke was pleasant. No perfume can be so sweet as the holy obedience of the faithful. Now God that was before annoyed with the ill savour of sin, smells a sweet savour of rest. Behold here a new and second rest! First, God rested from making the world, now he rests from destroying it; even while we cease not to offend, he ceases from a public revenge. His word was enough; yet withal he gives a sign, which may speak the truth of his promise to the very eyes of men. Thus he doth still in his blessed sacraments, which are as real words to the soul. The rainbow is the pledge of our safety, which even naturally signifies the end of a shower: all the signs of God's institution are proper and significant.

But who would look, after all this, to have found righteous Noah, the father of the new world, lying drunken in his tent! Who could think that wine should overthrow him that was preserved from the waters! that he, who could not be tainted with the sinful examples of the former world, should begin the example of a new sin of his own! What are we men if we be but ourselves! While God upholds us, no temptation can move us: when he leaves us, no temptation is too weak to overthrow us. What living man had ever so noble proofs of the mercy, of the justice of God: Mercy upon himself, justice upon others! What man had so gracious approbation from his Maker? Behold, he of whom in an unclean world, God said, Thee only have I found righteous, proves now unclean when the world was purged. The preacher of righteousness unto the former age, the king, priest, and prophet of the world renewed, is the first that renews the sins of that world which he had reproved, and which he saw condemned for sin. God's best children have no fence for sins of infirmity. Which of the saints have not once done that, whereof they are ashamed? God that lets us fall, knows how to make as good use of the sins of his holy ones, as of their obedience. If we had not such patterns, who could choose but despair at the sight of his sins?

Yet we find Noah drunken but once. One act can no more make a good heart unrighteous, than a trade of sin can stand with regeneration. But when I look to the effect of this sin, I cannot but blush and wonder; lo, this sin is worse than sin: other sins move shame, but hide it; this displays it to the world. Adam had no sooner sinned, but he saw and abhorred his own nakedness, seeking to hide it, even with bushes.

Noah had no sooner sinned, but he discovers his nakedness, and hath not so much rule of himself, as to be ashamed. One hour's drunkenness betrays that which more than six hundred years' sobriety had modestly concealed. He that gives himself to wine is not his own: what shall we think of this vice, which robs a man of himself, and lays a beast in his room? Noah's nakedness is seen in wine. It is no unusual quality, in this excess, to disclose secrets. Drunkenness doth both make imperfections, and show those we have to others' eyes; so would God have it, that we might be doubly ashamed both of those weaknesses which we discover, and of that weakness which moved us to discover. Noah is uncovered but in the midst of his own tent; it had been sinful, though no man had seen it. Unknown sins have their guilt and shame, and are justly attended with known punishments. Ungracious Cham saw it and laughed: his father's shame should have been his; the deformity of those parts from which he had his being, should have begotten in him a secret horror and dejection. How many graceless men make sport at the causes of their humiliation! Twice had Noah given him life; yet neither the name of a father and preserver, nor age nor virtue, could shield him from the contempt of his own. I see that even God's ark may nourish monsters. Some filthy toads may lie under the stones of the temple: God preserves some men in judgment. Better had it been for Cham to have perished in the waters, than to live unto his father's curse. Not content to be a witness of this filthy sight, he goes on to be a proclaimer of it. Sin doth ill in the eye, but worse in the tongue. As all sin is a work of darkness, so it should be buried in darkness. The report of sin is ofttimes as ill as the commission; for it can never be blazoned without uncharitableness; seldom without infection. Oh the unnatural, and more than Chamish impiety of those sons, which rejoice to publish the nakedness of their spiritual parents, even to their enemies!

Yet it was well for Noah that Cham could tell it to none but his own; and those, gracious and dutiful sons. Our shame is the less, if none know our faults but our friends. Behold, how love covereth sins! these good sons are so far from going forward to see their father's shame, that they go backward to hide it. The cloak is laid on both their shoulders, they both go back with equal paces, and dare not so much as look back, lest they should unwillingly see the cause of their shame, and will rather adventure to stumble at their father's body, than to see his nakedness. How did it grieve them to think, that they, which had so oft come to their holy father with reverence, must now in reverence turn their backs upon him! that they must now clothe him in pity, which had so often clothed them in love! And, which adds more to their duty, they covered him and said nothing. This modest sorrow is their praise, and our example. The sins of those we love and honour, we must hear of with indignation, fearfully and unwillingly believe, acknowledge with grief and shame, hide with honest excuses, and bury in silence.

How equal a regard is this both of piety and disobedience! Because Cham sinned against his father, therefore he shall be plagued in his children: Japheth is dutiful to his father, and finds it in his posterity. Because Cham was an ill son to his father, therefore his sons shall be servants to his brethren: because Japheth set his shoulder to Shem's, to bear the cloak of shame, therefore shall Japheth dwell in the tents of Shem, partaking with him in blessings as in duty. When we do but what we ought, yet God is thankful to us; and rewards that, which we should sin if we did not. Who could ever yet show me a man rebelliously undutiful to his parents, that hath prospered in himself, and his seed?

CONTEMPLATION II.—OF BABEL.

How soon are men and sins multiplied! within one hundred years, the world is as full of both, as if there had been no deluge. Though men could not but see the fearful monuments of the ruin of their ancestors, yet how quickly had they forgotten a flood! Good Noah lived to see the world both populous and wicked again: and doubtless ofttimes repented to have been the preserver of some, whom he saw to traduce the vices of the former world to the renewed. It could not but grieve him to see the destroyed giants revive out of his own loins, and to see them of his flesh and blood tyrannize over themselves. In his sight Nimrod, casting off the awe of his holy grandfather, grew imperious and cruel, and made his own kinsmen servants. How easy a thing it is for a great spirit to be the head of a faction, when even brethren will stoop to servitude! And now, when men are combined together, evil and presumptuous motions find encouragement in multitudes, and each man takes a pride in seeming forwardest: we are the cheerfuller in good, when we have the assistance of company; much more in sinning, by how much we are more prone to evil than good. It was a proud word—"Come, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven."

They were newly come down from the hills unto the plains, and now think of raising up of an hill of building in the plain. When their tents were pitched upon the mountains of Armenia, they were as near to heaven as their tower could make them; but their ambition must needs aspire to an height of their own raising. Pride is ever discontented, and still seeks matter of boasting in her own works.

How fondly do men reckon without God. "Come let us build;" as if there had been no stop but in their own will; as if both earth and time had been theirs. Still do all natural men build Babel, forecasting their own plots so resolutely, as if there were no power to countermand them. It is just with God, that peremptory determinations seldom prosper: whereas, those things, which are fearfully and modestly undertaken, commonly succeed.

"Let us build us a city." If they had taken God with them it had been commendable; establishing of societies is pleasing to him that is the God of order: but a tower whose top may reach to heaven, was a shameful arrogance, an impious presumption. Who would think, that we little ants, that creep upon this earth, should think of climbing up to heaven, by multiplying of earth?

Pride ever looks at the highest. The first man would know as God, these would dwell as God: covetousness and ambition know no limits. And what if they had reached up to heaven? Some hills are as high as they could hope to be, and yet are no whit the better; no place alters the condition of nature. An angel is glorious, though he be upon earth; and man is but earth though he be above the clouds. The nearer they had been to heaven, the more subject they had been to the violences of heaven, to thunders, lightnings, and those other higher inflammations; what had this been, but to thrust themselves into the hands of the revenger of all wicked insolencies! God loves that heaven should be looked at, and affected with all humble desires, with the holy ambitions of faith, not with the proud imaginations of our own achievements.

But wherefore was all this? not that they loved so much to be neighbours to heaven, as to be famous upon earth. It was not commodity that was here sought, not safety, but glory. Whither doth not thirst of fame carry men, whether in good or evil? It makes them seek to climb to heaven, it makes them not fear to run down headlong to hell. Even in the best things, desire of praise stands in competition with conscience, and brags to have the more clients. One builds a temple to Diana, in hope of glory, intending it for one of the great wonders of the world; another, in hope of fame, burns it. He is a rare man that hath not some Babel of his own, whereon he bestows pains and cost, only to be talked of. If they had done better things in a vain-glorious purpose, their act had been accursed: if they had built houses to God, if they had sacrificed, prayed, lived well; the intent poisons the action: But now both the act and the purpose are equally vain, and the issue is as vain as either.

God hath a special indignation at pride above all sins, and will cross our endeavours, not for that they are evil, (what hurt could be in laying one brick upon another?) but for that they are proudly undertaken. He could have hindered the laying of the first stone: and might as easily have made a trench for the foundation, the grave of the builders; but he loves to see what wicked men would do; and to let fools run themselves out of breath. What monument should they have had of their own madness, and his powerful interruption, if the walls had risen to no height? To stop them then in the midst of their course, he meddles not with either their hands or their feet, but their tongues; not by pulling them out, not by loosing their strings, not by making them say nothing, but by teaching them to say too much. Here is nothing varied but the sound of letters; even this frustrates the work, and befools the workmen. How easy is it for God ten thousand ways to correct and forestall the greatest projects of men! He that taught Adam the first words, taught them words that never were. One calls for brick, the other looks him in the face, and wonders what he commands, and how and why he speaks such words as were never heard, and instead thereof brings him mortar, returning him an answer as little understood; each chides with other, expressing his choler, so as he only can understand himself. From heat they fall to quiet entreaties, but still with the same success. At first every man thinks his fellow mocks him; but now perceiving this serious confusion, their only answer was silence, and ceasing; they could not come together, for no man could call them to be understood; and if they had assembled, nothing could be determined, because one could never attain to the other's purpose; no, they could not have the honour of a general dismission, but each man leaves his trowel and station, more like a fool than he undertook it: so commonly actions begun in glory shut up in shame. All external actions depend upon the tongue. No man can know another's mind, if this be not the interpreter. Hence, as there were many tongues given to stay the building of Babel, so there were as many given to build the new Jerusalem, the evangelical church. How dear hath Babel cost all the world! At the first, when there was but one language, men did spend their time in arts; (so was it requisite at the first settling of the world, and so came early to perfection) but now we stay so long (of necessity) upon the shell of tongues that we can hardly have time to chew the sweet kernel of knowledge. Surely men would have grown too proud, if there had been no Babel. It falls out ofttimes that one sin is a remedy of a greater. Division of tongues must needs slacken any work. Multiplicity of language had not been given by the Holy Ghost, for a blessing to the church, if the world had not been before possessed with multiplicity of languages for a punishment. Hence it is, that the building of our Sion rises no faster, because our tongues are divided. Happy were the church of God, if we all spake but one language: while we differ, we can build nothing but Babel; difference of tongues caused their Babel to cease, but it builds ours.

CONTEMPLATION III.—OF ABRAHAM.

It was fit that he which should be the father and pattern of the faithful, should be thoroughly tried; for in a set copy every fault is important, and may prove a rule of error. Of ten trials which Abraham passed, the last was the sorest. No son of Abraham can hope to escape temptations, while he sees that bosom in which he desires to rest, so assaulted with difficulties. Abraham must leave his country and kindred, and live amongst strangers. The calling of God never leaves men where it finds them. The earth is the Lord's, and all places are alike to the wise and faithful. If Chaldea had not been grossly idolatrous, Abraham had not left it; no bond must tie us to the danger of infection.

But whither must he go? To a place he knew not, to men that knew not him. It is enough comfort to a good man, wheresoever he is, that he is acquainted with God: we are never out of our way, while we follow the calling of God. Never any man lost by his obedience to the Highest. Because Abraham yielded, God gives him the possession of Canaan. I wonder more at his faith in taking this possession, than in leaving his own. Behold, Abraham takes possession for that seed which he had not; which in nature he was not like to have: of that land whereof he should not have one foot, wherein his seed should not be settled of almost five hundred years after. The power of faith can prevent time, and make future things present. If we be the true sons of Abraham, we have already (while we sojourn here on earth) the possession of our land of promise; while we seek our country, we have it.

Yet even Canaan doth not afford him bread, which yet he must believe shall flow with milk and honey to his seed. Sense must yield to faith. Woe were us, if we must judge of our future estate by the present. Egypt gives relief to Abraham, when Canaan cannot. In outward things, God's enemies may fare better than his friends. Thrice had Egypt preserved the church of God, in Abraham, in Jacob, in Christ. God ofttimes makes use of the world for the behoof of his, though without their thanks; as contrarily he uses the wicked for scourges to his own inheritance, and burns them; because in his good they intended evil.

But what a change is this! Hitherto hath Sarah been Abraham's wife, now Egypt hath made her his sister; fear hath turned him from a husband to a brother: no strength of faith can exclude some doubtings. God hath said, I will make thee a great nation: Abraham saith, the Egyptians will kill me. He that lived by his faith, yet shrinketh and sinneth. How vainly shall we hope to believe without all fear, and to live without infirmities! Some little aspersions of unbelief cannot hinder the praise and power of faith. Abraham believed, and it was imputed to him for righteousness. He that through inconsiderateness doubted twice of his own life, doubted not of the life of his seed, even from the dead and dry womb of Sarah; yet it was more difficult that his posterity should live in Sarah, than that Sarah's husband should live in Egypt; this was above nature, yet he believes it. Sometimes the believer sticks at easy trials, and yet breaks through the greatest temptations without fear. Abraham was old, ere this promise and hope of a son, and still the older, the more incapable; yet God makes him wait twenty-five years for performance. No time is long to faith, which hath learned to defer hopes without fainting and irksomeness.

Abraham heard this news from the angel, and laughed: Sarah heard it, and laughed: they did not more agree in their desire, than differ in their affection. Abraham laughed for joy: Sarah for distrust. Abraham laughed, because he believed it would be so; Sarah, because she believed it could not be. The same act varies in the manner of doing, and the intention of the doer. Yet Sarah laughed but within herself, and his bewrayed. How God can find us out in secret sins! How easily did she now think, that he, which could know of her inward laughter, could know of her conception! and now she that laughed, and believed not, believeth and feareth.

What a lively pattern do I see in Abraham, and Sarah, of a strong faith, and weak; of strong in Abraham, and weak in Sarah! She, to make God good of his word to Abraham, knowing her own barrenness, substitutes an Hagar; and, in an ambition of seed, persuades to polygamy. Abraham had never looked to obtain the promise by any other than a barren womb, if his own wife had not importuned him to take another. When our own apparent means fail, weak faith is put to their shifts, and projects strange devices of her own, to attain her end. She will rather conceive by another womb, than be childless. When she hears of an impossibility to nature, she doubteth, and yet hides her diffidence; and, when she must believe, feareth, because she did distrust. Abraham hears and believes, and expects and rejoices; he saith not, I am old and weak; Sarah is old and barren; where are the many nations that shall come from these withered loins? It is enough to him that God hath said it; he sees not the means, he sees the promise. He knew that God would rather raise him up seed from the very stones that he trode upon, than himself should want a large and happy issue.

There is no faith where there is either means or hopes. Difficulties and impossibilities are the true objects of belief. Hereupon God adds to his name, that which he would fetch from his loins, and made his name as ample as his posterity. Never any man was a loser by believing: faith is ever recompensed with glory.

Neither is Abraham content only to wait for God, but to smart for him. God bids him cut his own flesh; he willingly sacrifices this parcel of his skin and blood to him that was the owner of all. How glad he is to carry this painful mark of the love of his Creator! How forward to seal this covenant with blood, betwixt God and him! not regarding the soreness of his body, in comparison of the confirmation of his soul. The wound was not so grievous as a signification was comfortable. For herein he saw, that from his loins should come that blessed seed, which should purge his soul from all corruption. Well is that part of us lost which may give assurance of the salvation of the whole. Our faith is not yet sound, if it have not taught us to neglect pain for God, and more to love his sacraments than our own flesh.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—OF ISAAC SACRIFICED.

BUT all these are but easy tasks of faith: all ages have stood amazed at the next; not knowing whether they should more wonder at God's command, or Abraham's obedience. Many years had that good patriarch waited for his Isaac; now at last he hath joyfully received him; and that with this gracious acclamation, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called, and all nations blessed." Behold the son of his age, the son of his love, the son of his expectation; he that might not endure a mock from his brother, must now endure the knife of his father; "Take thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest, and get thee to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering."

Never any gold was tried in so hot a fire. Who but Abraham would not have expostulated with God? What! doth the God of mercies now begin to delight in blood? Is it possible that murder should become piety? Or if thou wilt needs take pleasure in a human sacrifice, is there none but Isaac fit for thine altar? none but Abraham to offer him? Shall these hands destroy the fruits of mine own loins? Can I not be faithful, unless I be unnatural? Or if I must needs be the monster of all parents, will not Ishmael yet be accepted? O God! where is thy mercy? where is thy justice? Hast thou given me but one only son, and must I now slay him? Why did I wait so long for him? Why didst thou give him me? Why didst thou promise me a blessing in him? What will the heathen say, when they shall hear of this infamous massacre? How can thy name, and my profession escape a perpetual blasphemy? With what face shall I look upon my wife Sarah, whose son I have murdered? How shall she entertain the executioner of Isaac? Or who will believe that I did this from thee? How shall not all the world spit at this holy cruelty, and say, There goes the man that cut the throat of his own son! Yet if he were an ungracious or rebellious child, his deserts might give some colour to this violence: but to lay hands on so dear, so dutiful, so hopeful a son, is incapable of all pretences.

But grant that thou, which art the God of nature, mayest either alter or neglect it; what shall I say to the truth of thy promises? Can thy justice admit contradictions? Can thy decrees be changeable? Canst thou promise and disappoint? Can these two stand together, Isaac shall live to be the father of nations, and Isaac shall now die by the hand of his father? When Isaac is once gone, where is my seed, where is my blessing? O God, if thy commands and purposes be capable of alteration, alter this bloody sentence, and let thy first word stand.

These would have been the thoughts of a weak heart. But God knew that he spake to an Abraham, and Abraham knew that he had to do with a God: faith had taught him not to argue but obey. In a holy wilfulness he either forgets nature or despises her: he is sure that what God commands is good, that what he promises is infallible; and therefore is careless of the means, and trusts to the end.

In matters of God, whosoever consults with flesh and blood, shall never offer up his Isaac to God. There needs no counsellor when we know God is the commander; here is neither grudging, nor deliberating, nor delaying; his faith would not suffer him so much as to be sorry for that he must do. Sarah herself may not know of God's charge and her husband's purpose, lest her affection should have overcome her faith; lest her weakness, now grown importunate, should have said, Disobey God, and die. That which he must do, he will do; he that hath learned not to regard the life of his son, had learned not to regard the sorrow of his wife. It is too much tenderness to respect the censures and constructions of others, when we have a direct word from God. The good patriarch rises early, and addresses himself to his sad journey. And now must he travel three whole days to this execution; and still must Isaac be in his eye, whom all this while he seems to see bleeding upon the pile of wood which he carries. There is nothing so miserable as to dwell under the expectation of a great evil. That misery which must be, is mitigated with speed, and aggravated with delay. All this while, if Abraham had repented him, he had leisure to return. There is no small trial, even in the very time of trial. Now, when they are come within sight of the chosen mountain, the servants are dismissed. What a devotion is this that will abide no witnesses! He will not suffer two of his own vassals to see him do that, which soon after all the world must know he hath done; yet is not Abraham afraid of that piety, which the beholders could not see without horror, without resistance, which no ear could hear of without abomination. What stranger could have endured to see the father carry the knife and fire, instruments of that death which he had rather suffer than inflict; the son securely carrying that burden which must carry him?

But if Abraham's heart could have known how to relent, that question of his dear, innocent, and religious son, had melted it into compassion: "My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the sacrifice?" I know not whether that word (my father) did not strike Abraham as deep as the knife of Abraham could strike his son: yet doth he not so much as think, O miserable man, that may not at once be a son to such a God, and father to such a son! Still he persists, and conceals; and, where he meant not, prophesies, "My son, God shall provide a lamb for the burnt-offering."

The heavy tidings were loath to come forth. It was a death to Abraham to say what he must do. He knows his own faith to act this; he knows not Isaac's to endure it. But now when Isaac hath helped to build the altar, whereon he must be consumed, he hears (not without astonishment) the strange command of God, the final will of his father: my son, thou art the lamb, which God hath provided for this burnt-offering. If my blood would have excused thee, how many thousand times had I rather to give thee my own life, than take thine! Alas! I am full of days, and now of long lived, but not in thee. Thou mightest have preserved the life of thy father, and have comforted his death; but the God of us both hath chosen thee. He, that gave thee unto me miraculously, bids me, by an unusual means, return thee unto him. I need not tell thee that I sacrifice all my worldly joys, yea and myself, in thee; but God must be obeyed: neither art thou too dear for him that calls thee. Come on, my son, restore the life that God hath given thee by me. Offer thyself willingly to these flames; send up thy soul cheerfully unto thy glory; and know, that God loves thee above others, since he requires thee alone to be consecrated in sacrifice to himself.

Who cannot imagine with what perplexed mixtures of passions, with what changes of countenance, what doubts, what fears, what amazement, good Isaac received this sudden message from the mouth of his father! how he questioned, how he pleaded! But when he had somewhat digested his thoughts, and considered that the author was God, the actor Abraham, the action a sacrifice, he now approves himself the son of Abraham: now he encourages the trembling hands of his father, with whom he strives in this praise of forwardness and obedience: now he offers his hands and feet to the cords, his throat to the knife, his body to the altar; and, growing ambitious of the sword and fire, entreats his father to do that which he would have done, though he had dissuaded him. O holy emulation of faith! O blessed agreement of the sacrificer, and oblation! Abraham is as ready to take as Isaac to give: he binds those dear hands which are more straitly bound with the cords of duty and resolution; he lays his sacrifice upon the wood, which now before-hand burnt inwardly with the heavenly fire of zeal and devotion.

And now having kissed him his last, not without mutual tears, he lifts up his hand to fetch the stroke of death at once, not so much as thinking, perhaps, God will relent after the first wound. Now the stay of Abraham, the hope of the church, lies bleeding under the hand of a father; what bowels can choose but yearn at this spectacle! Which of the savagest heathens, that had been now upon the hill of Moriah, and had seen (through the bushes) the sword of a father hanging over the throat of such a son, would not have been more perplexed in his thoughts than that unexpected sacrifice was in those briars? Yet he, whom it nearest concerned, is least touched: faith hath wrought the same in him which cruelty would in others, not to be moved. He contemns all fears, and overlooks all impossibilities. His heart tells him, that the same hand which raised Isaac from the dead womb of Sarah, can raise him again from the ashes of his sacrifice. With this confidence was the hand of Abraham now falling upon the throat of Isaac, who had given himself for dead, and rejoiced in the change; when suddenly the angel of God interrupts him, forbids him, commends him.

The voice of God was never so welcome, never so sweet, never so seasonable as now: it was the trial that God intended, not the fact; Isaac is sacrificed, and is yet alive; and now both of them are more happy in that they would have done, than they could have been distressed if they had done it. God's charges are ofttimes harsh in the beginnings and proceeding, but in the conclusion always comfortable. True spiritual comforts are commonly late and sudden. God defers on purpose, that our trials may be perfect, our deliverance welcome, our recompense glorious. Isaac had never been so precious to his father, if he had not been recovered from death; if he had not been as miraculously restored as given. Abraham had never been so blessed in his seed, if he had not neglected Isaac for God.

The only way to find comfort in an earthly thing, is to surrender it (in a faithful carelessness) into the hands of God. Abraham came to sacrifice: he may not go away with dry hands. God cannot abide that good purposes should be frustrate, lest either he should not do that for which he came, or should want means of speedy thanksgiving for so gracious a disappointment. Behold, a ram stands ready for the sacrifice, and as it were, proffers himself to this happy exchange. He that made that beast, brings him thither, fastens him there. Even in small things there is a great providence. What mysteries there are in every act of God! The only Son of God, upon this very hill, is laid upon the altar of the cross, and so becomes a true sacrifice for the world; that yet he is raised without impeachment, and exempted from the power of death. The Lamb of God, which takes away the sins of the world, is here really offered and accepted. One Saviour in two figures; in the one dying, restored in the other. So Abraham, while he exercises his faith, confirms it; and rejoices more to foresee the true Isaac in that place offered to death for his sins, than to see the carnal Isaac preserved from death for the reward of his faith. Whatsoever is dearest to us upon earth, is our Isaac: happy are we, if we can sacrifice it to God. Those shall never rest with Abraham, that cannot sacrifice with Abraham.

CONTEMPLATION V.—OF LOT AND SODOM.

BEFORE Abraham and Lot grew rich, they dwelt together; now their wealth separates them; their society was a greater good than their riches. Many a one is a loser by his wealth. Who would account those things good which make us worse! It had been the duty of young Lot to offer rather than to choose, to yield rather than contend. Who would not here think Abraham the nephew, and Lot the uncle? It is no disparagement for greater persons to begin treaties of peace. Better doth it beseem every son of Abraham to win with love, than to sway with power. Abraham yields over this right of his choice, Lot takes it: and behold, Lot is crossed in that which he chose, Abraham was blessed in that which was left him. God never suffers any man to lose by an humble remission of his right in a desire for peace.

Wealth had made Lot not only undutiful but covetous: he sees the goodly plains of Jordan, the richness of the soil, the commodity of the rivers, the situation of the cities; and now not once inquiring into the conditions of the inhabitants, he is in love with Sodom. Outward appearances are deceitful guides to our judgment or affections. They are worthy to be deceived that value things as they seem. It is not long after that Lot pays dear for his rashness. He fled for quietness with his uncle, and finds war with strangers. Now he is carried prisoner with all his substance, by great enemies: Abraham must rescue him, of whom he was forsaken. That wealth, which was the cause of his former quarrels, is made a prey to merciless heathens: that place, which his eye covetously chose, betrays his life and goods. How many Christians, while they have looked at gain, have lost themselves!

Yet this ill success hath neither driven out Lot nor amended Sodom; he stills loves his commodity, and the Sodomites their sins. Wicked men grow worse with afflictions, as water grows more cold after a heat: and as they leave not sinning, so God leaves not plaguing them, but still follows them with succession of judgments. In how few years hath Sodom forgot she was spoiled and led captive! If that wicked city had been warned by the sword, it had escaped the fire; but now this visitation hath not made ten good men in those five cities. How fit was this heap for the fire, which was all chaff! Only Lot vexed his righteous soul with the sight of their uncleanness: he vexed his own soul, for who bade him stay there? Yet because he was vexed, he is delivered. He escapeth their judgment, from whose sins he escaped. Though he would be a guest of Sodom, yet, because he would not entertain their sins, he becomes an host to the angels. Even the good angels are the executioners of God's judgment. There cannot be a better or more noble act, than to do justice upon obstinate malefactors.

Who can be ashamed of that which did not misbeseem the very angels of God! Where should the angels lodge but with Lot! The houses of holy men are full of these heavenly spirits, when they know not: they pitch their tents in ours, and visit us when we see not; and, when we feel not, protect us. It is the honour of God's saints to be attended by angels. The filthy Sodomites now flock together, stirred up with the fury of envy and lust, and dare require to do that in troops, which, to act single, had been too abominable to imagine natural. Continuance and society in evil makes wicked men outrageous and impudent. It is not enough for Lot to be the witness, but he must be the bawd also: "Bring forth these men that we may know them."

Behold even the Sodomites speak modestly, though their acts and intents be villanous. What a shame is it for those which profess purity of heart, to speak filthily! The good man craves and pleads the laws of hospitality; and, when he sees headstrong purposes of mischief, chooses rather to be an ill father than an ill host. His intention was good, but his offer was faulty. If, through his allowance, the Sodomites had defiled his daughters, it had been his sin: if through violence they had defiled his guests, it had been only theirs. There can be no warrant for us to sin, lest others should sin. It is for God to prevent sins with judgments; it is not for men to prevent a greater sin with a less. The best minds, when they are troubled, yield inconsiderate motions, as water that is violently stirred, sends up bubbles: God meant better to Lot, than to suffer his weak offer to be accepted. Those which are bent upon villany are more exasperated by dissuasion, as some strong streams, when they are resisted by flood-gates, swell over the banks.

Many a one is hardened by the good word of God, and instead of receiving the counsel, rages at the messenger. When men are grown to that pass, that they are no whit better by afflictions, and worse with admonitions, God finds it time to strike. Now Lot's guests begin to show themselves angels, and first deliver Lot in Sodom, than from Sodom; First strike them with blindness, whom they will after consume with fire. How little did the Sodomites think that vengeance was so near them! While they went groping in the streets, and cursing those whom they could not find, Lot with the angels is in secure light, and sees them miserable, and foresees them burning. It is the use of God, to blind and besot those whom he means to destroy. The light which they shall see shall be fiery, which shall be the beginning of an everlasting darkness, and a fire unquenchable. Now they have done sinning, and God begins to judge. Wickedness hath but a time; the punishment of wickedness is beyond all time. The residue of the night was both short and dangerous; yet good Lot, though sought for by the Sodomites, and newly *pulled into his* house by the angels, goes forth of his house to seek his sons-in-law. No good man would be saved alone. Faith makes us charitable with neglect of all peril. He warns them like a prophet, and advises them like a father, but both in vain: he seems to them as if he mocked, and they do more than seem to mock him again. Why should to-morrow differ from other days? Who ever saw it rain fire? Or whence should that brimstone come? Or if such showers must fall, how shall nothing burn but this valley? So to carnal men, preaching is foolishness, devotion idleness, the prophets madmen, Paul a babbler. These men's incredulity is as worthy of the fire, as the others' uncleanness. "He that believes not is condemned already."

The messengers of God do not only hasten Lot, but pull him by a gracious violence out of that impure city. They thirsted at once after vengeance upon Sodom, and Lot's safety; they knew God could not strike Sodom till Lot was gone out, and that Lot could not be safe within those walls. We are all naturally in Sodom: if God did not haul us out, while we linger, we should be condemned with the world. If God meet with a very good field, he pulls up the weeds, and lets the corn grow; if indifferent, he lets the corn and weeds grow together; if very ill, he gathers the few ears of corn, and burns the weeds.

Oh! the large bounty of God which reacheth not to us only, but to ours! God saves Lot for Abraham's sake, and Zoar for Lot's sake. If Sodom had not been too wicked, it had escaped. Were it not for God's dear children, that are intermixed with the world, it could not stand. The wicked owe their lives unto those few good, whom they hate and persecute. Now at once the sun rises upon Zoar, and fire falls down upon Sodom. Abraham stands upon the hill, and sees the cities burning. It is fair weather with God's children, when it is foulest with the wicked. Those which burned with the fire of lust, are now consumed with the fire of vengeance. They sinned against nature; and now against the course of nature, fire descends from heaven and consumes them. Lot may not so much as look at the flame, whether for the stay of his passage, or the horror of the sight or trial of his faith, or fear of commiseration. Small precepts from God are of importance. Obedience is as well tried, and disobedience as well punished, in little as in much. His wife doth but turn back her head; whether in curiosity, or unbelief, or love and compassion of the place, she is turned into a monument of disobedience. What doth it avail her not to be turned into ashes in Sodom, when she is turned into a pillar of salt in the plain? He that saved a whole city cannot save his own wife. God cannot abide small sins in those whom he hath obliged. If we displease him, God can as well meet with us out of Sodom. Lot, now come into Zoar, marvels at the stay of her, whom he might not before look back to call; and soon after returning to seek her, beholds this change with wonder and grief. He finds salt instead of flesh, a pillar instead of a wife. He finds Sodom consumed, and her standing; and is more amazed with this, by how much it was both more near him, and less expected.

When God delivers us from destruction, he doth not secure us from all afflictions. Lot hath lost his wife, his allies, his substance, and now betakes himself to an uncomfortable solitariness.

Yet though he fled from company, he could not fly from sin. He who could not be tainted with uncleanness in Sodom, is overtaken with drunkenness and incest in a cave. Rather than Satan shall not want baits, his own daughters will prove Sodomites. Those which should have comforted betrayed him. How little are some hearts moved with judgments! The ashes of Sodom, and the pillar of salt, were not yet out of their eye, when they dare think of lying with their own father. They knew, that whilst Lot was sober, he could not be unchaste. Drunkenness is the way to all bestial affections and acts. Wine knows no difference either of persons or sins. No doubt, Lot was afterwards ashamed of his incestuous seed, and now wished he had come alone out of Sodom; yet even this unnatural bed was blessed with increase; and one of our Saviour's worthy ancestors sprung after from this line. God's election is not tied to our means, neither are blessings or curses ever traduced. The chaste bed of holy parents hath ofttimes bred a monstrous generation; and contrarily, God hath raised sometimes an holy seed from the drunken bed of incest, or fornication. It hath been seen, that weighty ears of corn have grown out of the compass of the tilled field: thus will God magnify the freedom of his own choice, and let us know that we are not born, but made, good.

BOOK III.

CONTEMPLATION I.—OF JACOB AND ESAU.

Of all the patriarchs none made so little noise in the world as Isaac; none lived either so privately, or so innocently: neither know I whether he approved himself a better son or an husband; for the one he gave himself over to the knife of his father, and mourned three years for his mother; for the other he sought not to any handmaid's bed, but, in a chaste forbearance, reserved himself for twenty years' space, and prayed. Rebecca was so long barren. His prayers proved more effectual than his seed. At last she conceived, as if she had been more than the daughter-in-law to Sarah, whose son was given her, not out of the power of nature, but out of her husband's faith.

God is oft better to us than we would. Isaac prays for a son: God gives him two at once. Now she is no less troubled with the strife of the children in her womb, than before with the want of children. We know not when we are pleased: that which we desire ofttimes discontents us more in the fruition: we are ready to complain both full and fasting. Before Rebecca conceived, she was at ease. Before spiritual regeneration there is all peace in the soul: no sooner is the new man formed in us, but the flesh conflicts with the spirit. There is no grace where is no unquietness. Esau alone would not have striven. Nature will ever agree with itself. Never any Rebecca conceived only an Esau, or was so happy as to conceive none but a Jacob: she must be the mother of both, that she may have both joy and exercise. Every true Israelite begins his war without his being. How many actions which we know not of, are not without presage and signification!

These two were the champions of two nations: the field was their mother's womb; their quarrel precedency and superiority. Esau got the right of nature, Jacob of grace; yet that there might be some pretence of equality, lest Esau should outrun his brother into the world, Jacob holds him fast by the heel; so his hand was born before the other's foot. But, because Esau is some minutes the elder, that the younger might have better claim to that which God had promised, he buys that which he could not win. If either by strife, or purchase, or suit, we can attain spiritual blessings, we are happy. If Jacob had come forth first, he had not known how much he was bound to God for the favour of his advancement.

There was never any meat, except the forbidden fruit, so dear bought as this broth of Jacob; in both, the receiver and eater is accursed. Every true son of Israel will be content to purchase spiritual favours with earthly: and that man hath in him too much of the blood of Esau, who will not rather die than forego his birthright.

But what hath careless Esau lost, if, having sold his birthright, he may obtain the blessing? Or what hath Jacob gained, if his brother's venison may countervail his pottage? Yet thus hath old Isaac decreed, who was now not more blind in his eyes, than his affections. God had forewarned him that the elder should serve the younger, yet Isaac goes about to bless Esau.

It was as hard for Abraham to reconcile God's promise and Isaac's sacrifice, as for Isaac to reconcile the superiority of Jacob with Esau's benediction; for God's hand was in that, in this none but his own. The dearest of God's saints have been sometimes transported with natural affections. He saw himself preferred to Ishmael, though the elder. He saw his father wilfully forgetting nature at God's command, in binding him for sacrifice. He saw Esau lewdly matched with heathens, and yet he will remember nothing but Esau is my first-born. But how gracious is God, that when we would, will not let us sin! and so orders our actions, that we do not what we will, but what we ought.

That God which had ordained the lordship to the younger, will also contrive for him the blessing; what he will have effected, shall not want means. The mother shall rather defeat the son, and beguile the father, than the father shall beguile the chosen son of his blessing. What was Jacob to Rebecca, more than Esau? or what mother doth not more affect the elder? But now God inclines the love of the mother to the younger, against the custom of nature, because the father loves the elder, against the promise. The affections of the parents are divided; that the promise might be fulfilled, Rebecca's craft shall answer Isaac's partiality: Isaac would unjustly turn Esau into Jacob; Rebecca doth as cunningly turn Jacob into Esau: her desire was good; her means were unlawful. God doth ofttimes effect his just will by our weaknesses; yet neither thereby justifying our infirmities, nor blemishing his own actions.

Here was nothing but counterfeiting; a feigned person, a feigned name, feigned venison, a feigned answer, and yet behold a true blessing; but to the man, not to the means. Those were so unsound, that Jacob himself doth more fear their curse, than hope for their success. Isaac was now both simple and old; yet, if he had perceived the fraud, Jacob had been more sure of a curse, than he could be sure that he should not be perceived.

Those which are plain-hearted in themselves, are the bitterest enemies to deceit in others. Rebecca, presuming upon the oracle of God and her husband's simplicity, dare be his surety for the danger, his counsellor for the carriage of the business, his cook for the diet, yea, dresses both the meat and the man; and now puts words into his mouth, the dish into his hand, the garments upon his back, the goat's hair upon the open parts of his body, and sends him in thus furnished for the blessing, standing, no doubt, at the door, to see how well her device succeeded. And if old Isaac should, by any of his senses, have discerned the guile, she had soon stept in and undertaken the blame, and urged him with that known will of God concerning Jacob's dominion, and Esau's servitude, which either age or affection had made him forget.

And now she wishes she could borrow Esau's tongue as well as his garments, that she might securely deceive all the senses of him which had suffered himself to be more dangerously deceived with his affection. But this is past her remedy: her son must name himself Esau with the voice of Jacob. It is hard if our tongue do not bewray what we are, in spite of our habit. This was enough to work Isaac to a suspicion, to an inquiry, not to an incredulity. He that is good of himself, will hardly believe evil of another, and will rather distrust his own senses than the fidelity of those he trusted. All the senses are set to examine; none sticketh at the judgment, but the ear: to deceive that, Jacob must second his dissimulation with three lies at one breath; I am Esau;—as thou badest me;—my venison. One sin entertained, fetcheth in another; and if it be forced to lodge alone, either departeth or dieth. I love Jacob's blessing, but I hate his lie. I would not do that wilfully which Jacob did weakly, upon condition of a blessing. He that pardoned his infirmity would curse my obstinateness.

Good Isaac sets his hands to try whether his ears informed him aright; he feels the hands of him whose voice he suspected: that honest heart could not think that the skin might more easily be counterfeited than the lungs. A small satisfaction contents those whom guiltiness hath not made scrupulous. Isaac believes, and blesses the younger son in the garments of the elder. If our heavenly Father smell upon our backs the savour of our elder brother's robes, we cannot depart from him unblessed.

No sooner is Jacob gone away, full of the joy of his blessing, than Esau comes in, full of the hope of the blessing: and now he cannot repent him to have sold that in his hunger for pottage, which in his pleasure he shall buy again with venison. The hopes of the wicked fail them when they are at highest; whereas God's children find those comforts in extremity which they durst not expect.

Now he comes in blowing and sweating for his reward, and finds nothing but a repulse. Lewd men, when they think they have earned of God, and come proudly to challenge favour receive no answer but—"Who art thou?" Both the father and the son wonder at each other; the one with fear, the other with grief. Isaac trembled, and Esau wept; the one upon conscience, the other upon envy. Isaac's heart now told him, that he should not have purposed the blessing where he did; and that it was due to him unto whom it was given, and not purposed. Hence he durst not reverse that which he had done with God's will, besides his own: for now he saw that he had done unwilling justice. God will find both time and means to reclaim his own, to prevent their sins, to manifest and reform their errors. Who would have looked for tears from Esau? Or who dare trust tears when he sees them fall from so graceless eyes?

It was a good word, "Bless me also, my father." Every miscreant can wish himself well: no man would be miserable if it were enough to desire happiness. Why did he not rather weep to his brother for the pottage, than to Isaac for a blessing? If he had not then sold, he had not needed now to beg. It is just with God to deny us those favours which we were careless in keeping, and which we undervalued in enjoying. Esau's tears find no place for Isaac's repentance; except it were, that he hath done that by wile which he should have done upon duty.

No motive can cause a good heart to repent that he hath done well. How happy a thing it is to know the seasons of grace, and not to neglect them! How desperate to have known and neglected them! These tears were both late and false, the tears of rage, of envy, of carnal desire. Worldly sorrow causeth death. Yet while Esau howls out thus for a blessing, I hear him cry out, of his father's store, "Hast thou but one blessing, my father?" Of his brother's subtilty, "Was he not rightly called Jacob?" I do not hear him blame his own deserts. He did not see, while his father was deceived, and his brother crafty, that God was just, and himself incapable. He knew himself profane, and yet claims a blessing.

Those that care not to please God, yet care for the outward favours of God, and are ready to murmur if they want them; as if God were bound to them and they free. And yet so merciful is God, that he hath second blessings for those that love him not, and gives them all they care for. That one blessing of special love is for none but Israel; but those of common kindness are for them that can sell their birthright. This blessing was more than Esau could be worthy of: yet, like a second Cain, he resolves to kill his brother, because he was more accepted. I know, that whether he were a worse son or brother, he hopes for his father's death, and purposes his brother's, and vows to shed blood instead of tears. But wicked men cannot be so ill as they would; that strong wrestler against whom Jacob prevailed, prevailed with Esau, and turned his wounds into kisses. An host of men came with Esau; an army of angels met Jacob. Esau threatened, Jacob prayed; his prayers and presents have melted the heart of Esau into love. And now, instead of the grim and stern countenance of an executioner, Jacob sees the face of Esau as the face of God. Both men and devils are stinted; the stoutest heart cannot stand out against God. He that can wrestle earnestly with God, is secure from the harms of men. Those minds which are exasperated with violence, and cannot be broken with fear, yet are bowed with love: when the ways of a man please God, he will make his enemies at peace with him.

CONTEMPLATION II.—OF JACOB AND LABAN.

ISAAC's life was not more retired and quiet, than Jacob's was busy and troublesome. In the one I see the image of contemplation, of action in the other. None of the patriarchs saw so evil days as he; from whom justly hath the church of God, therefore, taken her name. Neither were the faithful ever since called Abrahamites, but Israelites. That no time might be lost, he began his strife in the womb; after that, he flies for his life from a cruel brother to a cruel uncle. With a staff goes he over Jordan alone, doubtful and comfortless, not like the son of Isaac. In the way the earth is his bed, and the stone his pillow; yet even there he sees a vision of angels. Jacob's heart was never so full of joy as when his head lay hardest. God is most present with us in our greatest dejection, and loves to give comfort to those that are forsaken of their hopes.

He came far to find out an hard friend, and of a nephew becomes a servant. No doubt when Laban heard of his sister's son, he looked for the camels and attendance that came to fetch his sister Rebecca; not thinking that Abraham's servant could come better furnished than Isaac's son; but now when he saw nothing but a staff, he looks upon him, not as an uncle, but a master. And while he pretends to offer him a wife as the reward of his service, he craftily requires his service as the dowry of his wife.

After the service of a hard apprenticeship hath earned her whom he loved, his wife is changed, and he is in a sort forced to an unwilling adultery. His mother had before, in a cunning disguise, substituted him, who was the younger son, for the elder; and now, not long after, his father-in-law, by a like fraud, substitutes to him the elder daughter for the younger. God comes oftentimes home to us in our own kind; and even by the sin of others pays us our own, when we look not for it. It is doubtful whether it were a greater cross to marry whom he would not, or to be disappointed of her whom he desired. And now he must begin a new hope, where he made account of fruition. To raise up an expectation once frustrate, is more difficult than to continue a long hope drawn on with likelihoods of performance: yet, thus dear is Jacob content to pay for Rachel fourteen years' servitude. Commonly God's children come not easily by their pleasures. What miseries will not love digest and overcome? And if Jacob were willingly consumed with heat in the day, and frost in the night, to become the son-in-law to Laban, what should we refuse to be the sons of God?

Rachel, whom he loved, is barren: Leah, which was despised, is fruitful. How wisely God weighs out to us our favours and crosses in an equal balance; so tempering our sorrows that they may not oppress, and our joys that they may not transport us! Each one hath some matter of envy to others, and of grief to himself.

Leah envies Rachel's beauty and love: Rachel envies Leah's fruitfulness: yet Leah would not be barren, nor Rachel blear-eyed. I see in Rachel the image of her grandmother Sarah, both in her beauty of person, in her actions, in her success. She also will needs suborn her handmaid to make her a mother, and at last, beyond hope, herself conceiveth. It is a weak greediness in us to affect God's blessings by unlawful means. What a proof and praise had it been of her faith, if she had staid God's leisure, and would rather have endured her barrenness than her husband's polygamy! Now she shows herself the daughter of Laban: the father for covetousness, the daughters for emulation, have drawn sin into Jacob's bed: he offended in yielding, but they more in soliciting him, and therefore the fact is not imputed to Jacob, but to them. In those sins which Satan draws us into, the blame is ours: in those which we move each other into the most fault and punishment lies upon the tempter.

None of the patriarchs divided his seed into so many wombs as Jacob; none was so much crossed in his seed.

Thus, rich in nothing but wives and children, was he now returning to his father's house, accounting his charge his wealth. But God meant him yet more good. Laban sees that both his family and his flocks were well increased by Jacob's service. Not his love therefore, but his gain makes him loath to part. Even Laban's covetousness is made by God the means to enrich Jacob.

Behold, his strait master entreats him to that recompense, which made his nephew mighty and himself envious. God, considering his hard service, paid him wages out of Laban's folds. Those flocks and herds had but a few spotted sheep and goats, until Jacob's covenant; then (as if the fashion had been altered) they all ran into parted colours; the most and best (as if they had been weary of their former owner) changed the colours of their young, that they might change their master.

In the very shapes and colours of brute creatures there is a divine hand, which disposeth them to his own ends. Small and unlikely means shall prevail where God intends an effect. Little peeled sticks of hazel, or poplar, laid in the troughs, shall enrich Jacob with an increase of his spotted flocks; Laban's sons might have tried the same means, and failed. God would have Laban know, that he put a difference betwixt Jacob and him; that as for fourteen years he had multiplied Jacob's charge of cattle to Laban, so now, for the last six years, he would multiply Laban's flock to Jacob: and if Laban had the more, yet the better were Jacob's. Even in these outward things, God's children have many times sensible tastes of his favours above the wicked.

I know not whether Laban were a worse uncle, or father, or master: he can like well Jacob's service, not his wealth. As the wicked have no peace with God, so the godly have no peace with men; for if they prosper not, they are despised; if they prosper, they are envied. This uncle, whom his service had made his father, must now, upon his wealth, be fled from as an enemy, and like an enemy pursues him: if Laban had meant to have taken a peaceable leave, he had never spent seven days' journey in following his innocent son. Jacob knew his churlishness, and therefore resolved rather to be unmannerly than injured. Well might he think that he, whose oppression changed his wages so often in his stay, would also abridge his wages in the parting; now therefore he wisely prefers his own estate to Laban's love. It is not good to regard too much the unjust discontentment of worldly men, and to purchase unprofitable favour with too great loss.

Behold, Laban follows Jacob with one troop, Esau meets him with another, both with hostile intentions: both go on to the utmost point of their execution: both are prevented ere the execution. God makes fools of the enemies of his church; he lets them proceed, that they may be frustrate; and, when they are gone to the utmost reach of their tether, he pulls them back to their task with shame. Lo now, Laban leaves Jacob with a kiss; Esau meets him with a kiss: of the one he hath an oath, tears of the other, peace with both. Who shall need to fear man that is in league with God?

But what a wonder is this! Jacob received not so much hurt from all his enemies, as from his best friend. Not one of his hairs perished by Laban or Esau, yet he lost a joint by the angel, and was sent halting to his grave. He that knows our strength, yet will wrestle with us for our exercise, and loves our violence and importunity.

O happy loss of Jacob! he lost a joint and won a blessing. It is a favour to halt from God, yet this favour is seconded with a greater. He is blessed, because he would rather halt than leave, ere he was blessed. If he had left sooner, he had not halted, but he had not prospered. That man shall go away sound, but miserable, that loves a limb more than a blessing. Surely, if Jacob had not wrestled with God, he had been foiled with evils. How many are the troubles of the righteous!

Not long after, Rachel, the comfort of his life, dieth. And when? but in her travel, and in his travel to his father. When he had now before digested in his thoughts the joy and gratulation of his aged father, for so welcome a burden, his children (the staff of his age) wound his soul to the death. Reuben proves incestuous, Judah adulterous, Dinah ravished, Simeon and Levi murderous, Er and Onan stricken dead, Joseph lost, Simeon imprisoned, Benjamin, the death of his mother, the father's right hand, endangered; himself driven by famine, in his old age, to die amongst the Egyptians, a people that held it abomination to eat with him. If that angel with whom he strove, and who therefore strove for him, had not delivered his soul out of all adversity, he had been supplanted with evils, and had been so far from gaining the name of Israel, that he had lost the name of Jacob. Now, what son of Israel can hope for good days, when he hears his father's were so evil? It is enough for us, if, when we are dead, we can rest with him in the land of promise. If the angel of the covenant once bless us, no pain, no sorrows can make us miserable.

CONTEMPLATION III.—OF DINAH.

I FIND but one only daughter of Jacob, who must needs therefore be a great darling to her father; and she so miscarries, that she causes her father's grief to be more than his love. As her mother Leah, so she hath a fault in her eyes, which was curiosity. She will needs see and be seen; and while she doth vainly see, she is seen lustfully. It is not enough for us to look to our own thoughts, except we beware of the provocations of others. If we once wander out of the lists that God hath set us in our callings, there is nothing but danger. Her virginity had been safe, if she had kept home; or if Shechem had forced her in her mother's tent, this loss of her virginity had been without her sin; now she is not innocent that gave the occasion.

Her eyes were guilty of the temptation; only to see, is an unsufficient warrant to draw us into places of spiritual hazard. If Shechem had seen her busy at home, his love had been free from outrage; now the lightness of her presence gave encouragement to his inordinate desires. Immodesty of behaviour makes way to lust, and gives life unto wicked hopes: yet Shechem bewrays a good nature, even in filthiness. He loves Dinah after his sin, and will needs marry her whom he had defiled. Commonly lust ends in loathing. Amnon abhors Thamar as much after his act, as before he loved her; and beats her out of doors, whom he was sick to bring in. But Shechem would not let Dinah fare the worse for his sin. And now he goes about to entertain her with honest love, whom the rage of his lust had dishonestly abused. Her deflowering shall be no prejudice to her, since her shame shall redound to none but him; and he will hide her dishonour with the name of a husband. What could he now do but sue to his father, to her's, to herself, to her brethren; entreating that, with humble submission, which he might have obtained by violence? Those actions which are ill begun, can hardly be salved up with late satisfactions; whereas good entrances give strength unto the proceedings, and success to the end.

The young man's father doth not only consent, but solicit; and is ready to purchase a daughter either with substance or pain. The two old men would have ended the matter peaceably; but youth commonly undertakes rashly, and performs with passion. The sons of Jacob think of nothing but revenge, and (which is worst of all) begin their cruelty with craft, and hide their craft with religion. A smiling malice is most deadly; and hatred doth most rankle the heart when it is kept in and dissembled. "We cannot give our sister to an uncircumcised man." Here was God in the mouth, and Satan in the heart. The bloodiest of all projects have ever wont to be coloured with religion; because the worse any thing is, the better show it desires to make; and, contrarily, the better colour is put upon any vice, the more odious it is; for as every simulation adds to an evil, so the best adds most evil. Themselves had taken the daughters and sisters of uncircumcised men; yea, Jacob himself did so; why might not an uncircumcised man obtain their sister? Or, if there be a difference of giving and taking, it had been well if it had not been only pretended. It had been a happy ravishment of Dinah, that should have drawn a whole country into the bosom of the church. But here was a sacrament intended, not to the good of the soul, but to the murder of the body. It was a hard task for Hamor and Shechem, not only to put the knife to their own foreskins, but to persuade a multitude to so painful a condition.

The sons of Jacob dissemble with them, they with the people. "Shall not their flocks and substance be ours?" Common profit is pretended; whereas only Shechem's pleasure is meant. No motive is so powerful to the vulgar sort, as the name of commodity: the hope of this makes them prodigal of their skin and blood; not the love to the sacrament, not the love to Shechem: sinister respects draw more to the profession of religion than conscience. If it were not for the loaves and fishes, the train of Christ would be less. But the sacraments of God, misreceived, never prosper in the end. These men are content to smart, so they may gain.

And now, that every man lies sore of his own wound, Simeon and Levi rush in armed, and wound all the males to death. "Cursed be their wrath, for it was fierce; and their rage, for it was cruel." Indeed, filthiness should not have been wrought in Israel; yet murder should not have been wrought by Israel: if they had been fit judges, (which were but bloody executioners) how far doth the punishment exceed the fault? To punish above the offence, is no less injustice than to offend. One offendeth, and all feel the revenge: yea all (though innocent) suffer that revenge, which he that offended deserved not. Shechem sinneth, but Dinah tempted him. She that was so light, as to wander abroad alone, only to gaze, I fear was not over difficult to yield; and if, having wrought her shame, he had driven her home with disgrace to her father's tent, such tyrannous lust had justly called for blood: but now he craves, and would pay dear for but leave to give satisfaction.

To execute rigour upon a submissive offender, is more merciless than just. Or if the punishment had been both just and proportionable from another, yet from them which had viewed peace and affinity, it was shamefully unjust. To disappoint the trust of another, and to neglect our own promise and fidelity for private purposes, adds faithlessness unto our cruelty. That they were impotent, it was through their circumcision: what impiety was this, instead of honouring a holy sign, to take an advantage by it! What shrieking was there now in the streets of the city of the Hivites! And how did the beguiled Shechemites, when they saw the swords of the two brethren, die cursing the sacraments in their hearts, which had betrayed them! Even their curses were the sins of Simeon and Levi, whose fact, though it were abhorred by their father, yet it was seconded by their brethren. Their spoil makes good the others' slaughter. Who would have looked to have found this outrage in the family of Jacob! How did that good patriarch, when he saw Dinah come home blubbered and wringing her hands, Simeon and Levi sprinkled with blood, wish that Leah had been barren as long as Rachel! Good parents have grief enough (though they sustain no blame) for their children's sins. What great evils arise from small beginnings! The idle curiosity of Dinah hath bred all this mischief; ravishment follows upon her wandering; upon her ravishment, murder; upon the murder, spoil. It is holy and safe to be jealous of the first occasions of evil, either done or suffered.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—OF JUDAH AND THAMAR.

I FIND not many of Jacob's sons more faulty than Judah; who yet is singled out from all the rest, to be the royal progenitor of Christ, and to be honoured with the dignity of the birth-right, that God's election might not be of merit, but of grace: else, howsoever he might have sped alone. Thamar had never been joined with him in this line. Even Judah marries a Canaanite; it is no marvel though his seed prosper not. And yet, that good children may not be too much discouraged with their unlawful propagation, the fathers of the promised seed are raised from an incestuous bed. Judah was very young, scarce from under the rod of his father, yet he takes no other counsel for his marriage, but from his own eyes, which were, like his sister Dinah's, roving and wanton. What better issue could be expected from such beginnings? Those proud Jews, that glory so much of their pedigree and name from this patriarch, may now choose whether they will have their mother a Canaanite or a harlot; even in these things ofttimes the birth follows the belly. His eldest son Er is too wicked to live; God strikes him dead ere he can leave any issue, not abiding any scions to grow out of so bad a stock.

Notorious sinners God reserves to his own vengeance. He doth not inflict sensible judgments upon all his enemies, lest the wicked should think there were no punishment abiding for them elsewhere. He doth inflict such judgments upon some, lest he should seem careless of evil. It were as easy for him to strike all dead, as one: but he had rather all should be warned by one; and would have his enemies find him merciful, as well as his children just: his brother Onan sees the judgment, and yet follows his sins. Every little thing discourages us from good: nothing can alter the heart that is set upon evil. Er was not worthy of any love; but, though he were a miscreant, yet he was a brother. Seed should have been raised to him: Onan justly loses his life with his seed, which he would rather spill, than lend to a wicked brother. Some duties we owe to humanity, more to our nearness of blood. Ill deservings of others can be no excuse for our injustice, for our uncharitableness. That which Thamar required, Moses afterward, as from God, commanded, the succession of brothers into the barren bed. Some laws God spake to his church, long ere he wrote them: while the author is certainly known, the voice and the finger of God are worthy of equal respect. Judah had lost two sons, and now doth but promise the third, whom he sins in not giving. It is the weakness of nature, rather to hazard a sin than a danger, and to neglect our own duty, for wrongful suspicion of others: though he had lost his son in giving him, yet he should have given him. A faithful man's promise is his debt, which no fear of damage can dispense with.

But whereupon was his slackness? Judah feared that some unhappiness in the bed of Thamar was the cause of his son's miscarriage; whereas it was their fault, that Thamar was both a widow and childless. Those that are but the patients of evil, are many times burdened with suspicions; and therefore are ill thought of, because they fare ill. Afflictions would not be so heavy, if they did not lay us open unto uncharitable conceits.

What difference God puts betwixt sins of wilfulness and infirmity! The son's pollution is punished with present death, the father's incest is pardoned, and in a sort prospereth.

Now Thamar seeks by subtilty, that which she could not have by award of justice. The neglect of due retributions drives men to indirect courses; neither know I whether they sin more in righting themselves wrongfully, or the other in not righting them. She therefore takes upon her the habit of a harlot, that she might perform the act: if she had not wished to seem a whore, she had not worn that attire, nor chosen that place. Immodesty of outward fashion or gesture bewrays evil desires. The heart that means well, will never wish to seem ill: for commonly we affect to show better than we are. Many harlots will put on the semblances of chastity, of modesty; never the contrary. There is no trusting those, which do not wish to appear good. Judah esteems her by her habit; and now the sight of a harlot hath stirred up in him a thought of lust. Satan finds well, that a fit object is half a victory.

Who would not be ashamed to see a son of Jacob thus transported with filthy affections! At the first sight he is inflamed; neither yet did he see the face of her whom he lusted after: it was motive enough to him that she was a woman, neither could the presence of his neighbour, the Adullamite, compose those wicked thoughts, or hinder his unchaste acts.

That sin must needs be impudent which can abide a witness: yea, so hath his lust besotted him, that he cannot discern the voice of Thamar, that he cannot foresee the danger of his shame in parting with such pledges. There is no passion, which doth not for the time bereave a man of himself. Thamar had learned not to trust him without a pawn: he had promised his son to her as a daughter, and failed; now he promised a kid to her, as an harlot, and performeth it. Whether his pledge constrained him, or the power of his word, I inquire not. Many are faithful in all things, save those which are the greatest and dearest. If his credit had been as much endangered in the former promise, he had kept it. Now hath Thamar requited him. She expected long the enjoying of his promised son, and he performed not. But here he performs the promise of the kid, and she stays not to expect it. Judah is sorry that he cannot pay the hire of his lust, and now feareth lest he shall be beaten with his own staff, lest his signet should be used to confirm and seal his reproach; resolving not to know them, and wishing they were unknown of others. Shame is the easiest wages of sin, and the surest which ever begins first in ourselves. Nature is not more forward to commit sin, than willing to hide it.

I hear as yet of no remorse in Judah, but fear of shame. Three months hath his sin slept; and now, when he is securest, it awakes and baits him. News is brought him that Thamar begins to swell with her conception, and now he swells with rage, and calls her forth to the flame like a rigorous judge, without so much as staying for the time of her deliverance, that his cruelty, in this justice should be no less ill, than the injustice of occasioning it. If Judah had not forgotten his sin, his pity had been more than his hatred to this of his daughter's. How easy is it to detest those sins in others, which we flatter in ourselves! Thamar doth not deny the sin, nor refuse punishment; but calls for that partner in her punishment, which was partner in the sin. The staff, the signet, the handkerchief, accuse and convince Judah; and now he blushes at his own sentence, much more, at his act, and cries out, "She is more righteous than I!" God will find a time to bring his children upon their knees, and to wring from them penitent confessions. And, rather than he will not have them soundly ashamed, he will make them the trumpets of their own reproach.

Yet doth he not offer himself to the flame with her, but rather excuses her by himself. This relenting in his own case, shamed his former zeal. Even in the best men, nature is partial to itself. It is good so to sentence others' frailties, that yet we remember our own, whether those that have been, or may be. With what shame, yea with what horror, must Judah needs look upon the great belly of Thamar, and on her two sons, the monuments of his filthiness!

How must it needs wound his soul, to hear them call him both father and grandfather; to call her mother and sister! If this had not cost him many a sigh, he had no more escaped his father's curse, than Reuben did: I see the difference, not of sins, but of men. Remission goes not by the measure of the sin, but the quality of the sinner; yea, rather, the mercy of the forgiver. "Blessed is the man (not that sins not, but) to whom the Lord imputes not his sin."

CONTEMPLATION V.—OF JOSEPH.

I MARVEL not that Joseph had the double portion of Jacob's land, who had more than two parts of his sorrows. None of his sons did so truly inherit his afflictions; none of them was either so miserable or so great: suffering is the way to glory. I see in him not a clearer type of Christ, than of every Christian. Because we are dear to our Father, and complain of sins, therefore are we hated of our carnal brethren. If Joseph had not meddled with his brother's faults, yet he had been envied for his father's affection; but now malice is met with envy. There is nothing more thankless or dangerous than to stand in the way of a resolute sinner. That which doth correct and oblige the penitent, makes the wilful mind furious and revengeful.

All the spite of his brethren cannot make Joseph cast off the livery of his father's love. What need we care for the censures of men, if our hearts can tell us that we are in favour with God?

But what meant young Joseph to add unto his own envy by reporting his dreams? The concealment of our hopes or abilities hath not more modesty than safety. He that was envied for his dearness, and hated for his intelligence, was both envied and hated for his dreams. Surely God meant to make the relation of these dreams a means to effect that which the dreams imported. We men work by likely means: God by contraries. The main quarrel was, "Behold this dreamer cometh!" Had it not been for his dreams, he had not been sold: if he had not been sold, he had not been exalted. So Joseph's state had not deserved envy, if his dreams had not caused him to be envied. Full little did Joseph think, when he went to seek his brethren, that this was the last time he should see his father's house. Full little did his brethren think, when they sold him naked to the Ishmaelites, to have once seen him in the throne of Egypt. God's decree runs on; and while we either think not of it, or oppose it, is performed.

In an honest and obedient simplicity, Joseph comes to inquire of his brethren's health, and now may not return to carry news of his own misery: whilst he thinks of their welfare, they are plotting his destruction; "Come, let us slay him." Who would have expected this cruelty in them, which should be the fathers of God's church! It was thought a favour, that Reuben's entreaty obtained for him, that he might be cast into the pit alive, to die there. He looked for brethren, and behold murderers: every man's tongue, every man's fist was bent against him. Each one strives who shall lay the first hand upon that changeable coat which was dyed with their father's love, and their envy: and now they have stript him naked, and hauling him by both arms, as it were, cast him alive into his grave. So, in pretence of forbearance, they resolve to torment him with a lingering death. The savagest robbers could not have been more merciless: for now, besides, (what in them lies), they kill their father in their brother. Nature, if it once degenerate, grows more monstrous and extreme, than a disposition born to cruelty.

All this while Joseph wanted neither words nor tears; but, like a passionate suppliant, (bowing his bare knees to them whom he dreamed should bow to him), entreats and persuades, by the dear name of their brotherhood, by their profession of one common God, for their father's sake, for their own souls' sake, not to sin against his blood. But envy hath shut out mercy, and makes them not only forget themselves to be brethren, but men. What stranger can think of poor innocent Joseph, crying naked in that desolate and dry pit, (only saving that he moistened it with tears), and not be moved! Yet his hard-hearted brethren sit them down carelessly, with the noise of his lamentation in their ears, to eat bread, not once thinking, by their own hunger, what it was for Joseph to be famished to death.

Whatsoever they thought, God never meant that Joseph should perish in that pit; and therefore he sends the very Ismaelites to ransom him from his brethren: the seed of him that persecuted his brother Isaac, shall now redeem Joseph from his brethren's persecution. When they came to fetch him out of the pit, he now hoped for a speedy despatch; that since they seemed not to have so much mercy as to prolong his life, they would not continue so much cruelty as to prolong his death.

And now, when he hath comforted himself with hope of the favour of dying, behold death exchanged for bondage! How much is servitude, to an ingenuous nature, worse than death! for this is common to all; that, to none but the miserable. Judah meant this well, but God better. Reuben saved him from the sword, Judah from famishing. God will ever raise up some secret favourers to his own, amongst those that are most malicious. How well was this favour bestowed! If Joseph had died for hunger in the pit, both Jacob and Judah, and all his brethren, had died for hunger in Canaan. Little did the Ismaelitish merchants know what a treasure they bought, carried, and sold; more precious than all their balm and myrrhs. Little did they think that they had in their hands the lord of Egypt, the jewel of the world. Why should we contemn any man's meanness, when we know not his destiny?

One sin is commonly used for the veil of another: Joseph's coat is sent home dipped in blood, that, while they should hide their own cruelty, they might afflict their father, no less than their brother. They have devised this real lie, to punish their old father, for his love, with so grievous a monument of his sorrow.

He that is mourned for in Canaan as dead, prospers in Egypt under Potiphar; and of a slave, is made ruler. Thus God meant to prepare him for a greater charge; he must first rule Potiphar's house, then Pharaoh's kingdom: his own service is his least good, for his very presence procures a common blessing: a whole family shall fare the better for one Joseph. Virtue is not looked upon alike with all eyes: his fellows praise him, his master trusts him, his mistress affects him too much. All the spite of his brethren was not so great a cross to him, as the inordinate affection of his mistress. Temptations on the right hand are now more perilous, and hard to resist, by how much they are more plausible and glorious; but the heart that is bent upon God, knows how to walk steadily and indifferently betwixt the pleasures of sin and fears of evil. He saw this pleasure would advance him: he knew what it was to be a minion of one of the greatest ladies in Egypt, yet resolves to contemn. A good heart will rather lie in the dust, than rise by wickedness—"How shall I do this, and sin against God?"

He knew that all the honours of Egypt could not buy off the guilt of one sin; and therefore abhors not only her bed, but her company. He that will be safe from the acts of evil, must wisely avoid the occasions. As sin ends ever in shame, when it is committed, so it makes us past shame, that we may commit it. The impudent strumpet dare not only solicit, but importune, and in a sort force the modesty of her good servant: she lays hold on his garment; her hand seconds her tongue.

Good Joseph found it now time to fly, when such an enemy pursued him: how much had he rather leave his cloak than his virtue! And to suffer his mistress to spoil him of his livery, rather than he should blemish her honour, or his master's in her, or God in either of them!

This second time is Joseph stript of his garment: before, in the violence of envy, now, of lust; before, of necessity, now, of choice: before, to deceive his father, now, his master: for behold, the pledge of his fidelity, which he left in those wicked hands, is made an evidence against him, of that which he refused to do: therefore did he leave his cloak, because he would not do that of which he is accused and condemned, because he left it. What safety is there against great adversaries, when even arguments of innocence are used to convince of evil! Lust yielded unto is a pleasant madness; but is a desperate madness when it is opposed; no hatred burns so furiously as that which arises from the quenched coals of love.

Malice is witty to devise accusations of others, out of their virtue and our own guiltiness. Joseph either pleads not, or is not heard.

Doubtless he denied the fact, but he dare not accuse the offender. There is not only the praise of patience, but ofttimes of wisdom, even in unjust sufferings. He knew that God would find a time to clear his innocence, and to regard his chaste faithfulness.

No prison would serve him but Pharaoh's. Joseph had lain obscure, and not been known to Pharaoh, if he had not been cast into Pharaoh's dungeon. The afflictions of God's children turn ever to their advantages. No sooner is Joseph a prisoner, than a guardian of the prisoners. Trust and honour accompany him wheresoever he is: in his father's house, in Potiphar's, in the jail, in the court; still he hath both favour and rule.

So long as God is with him, he cannot but shine, in spite of men. The walls of that dungeon cannot hide his virtues, the irons cannot hold them. Pharaoh's officers are sent to witness his graces, which he may not come forth to show. The cup-bearer admires him in the jail, but forgets him in the court. How easily doth our own prosperity make us either forget the deservings or miseries of others! But as God cannot neglect his own, so least of all in their sorrows. After two years more of Joseph's patience, that God, which caused him to be lifted up out of the former pit to be sold, now calls him out of the dungeon to honour. He now puts a dream into the head of Pharaoh; he puts the remembrance of Joseph's skill into the head of the cup-bearer; who, to pleasure Pharaoh, not to requite Joseph, commends the prisoner for an interpreter. He puts an interpretation in the mouth of Joseph: he puts this choice into the heart of Pharaoh, of a miserable prisoner, to make him the ruler of Egypt. Behold, one hour hath changed his fetters into a chain of gold, his rags into fine linen, his stocks into a chariot, his jail into a palace, Potiphar's captive into his master's lord, the noise of his chains into ABRECH. He, whose chastity refused the wanton allurements of the wife of Potiphar, had now given him to his wife the daughter of Potipherah. Humility goes before honour: serving and suffering are the best tutors to government. How well are God's children paid for their patience! How happy are the issues of the faithful! Never any man repented him of the advancement of a good man.

Pharaoh hath not more preferred Joseph, than Joseph hath enriched Pharaoh: if Joseph had not ruled, Egypt and all the bordering nations had perished. The providence of so faithful an officer hath both given the Egyptians their lives, and the money, cattle, lands, bodies of the Egyptians to Pharaoh. Both have reason to be well pleased. The subjects owe to him their lives; the king his subjects, and his dominions. The bounty of God made Joseph able to give more than he received: it is like, the seven years of plenty were not confined to Egypt; other countries adjoining, were no less fruitful; yet, in the seven years of famine, Egypt had corn when they wanted.

See the difference betwixt a wise prudent frugality, and a vain ignorant expense of the benefits of God. The sparing hand is both full and beneficial; whereas the lavish is not only empty, but injurious.

Good Jacob is pinched with the common famine. No pity can exempt us from the evils of neighbourhood. No man can tell, by outward events, which is the patriarch, and which the Canaanite.

Neither doth his profession lead him to the hope of a miraculous preservation. It is a vain tempting of God, to cast ourselves upon an immediate provision with neglect of common means. His ten sons must now leave their flocks and go down into Egypt, to be their father's purveyors. And now they go to buy of him whom they had sold; and bow their knees to him, for his relief, which had bowed to them before for his own life. His age, his habit, the place, the language, kept Joseph from their knowledge; neither had they called off their minds from their folds, to inquire of matters of foreign state, or to hear that an Hebrew was advanced to the highest honour of Egypt. But he cannot but know them, whom he left at their full growth, whose tongue and habit, and number were all one; whose faces had left so deep an impression in his mind at their unkind parting. It is wisdom sometimes to conceal our knowledge, that we may not prejudice truth.

He that was hated of his brethren, for being his father's spy, now accuses his brethren for common spies of the weakness of Egypt: he could not, without their suspicion, have come to a perfect intelligence of his father's estate and theirs, if he had not objected to them that which was not. We are always bound to go the nearest way to truth. It is more safe, in cases of inquisition, to fetch far about: that he might seem enough an Egyptian, he swears heathenishly: how little could they suspect this oath would proceed from the son of him, which swore by the fear of his father Isaac! How oft have sinister respects drawn weak goodness to disguise itself, even with sins!

It was no small joy to Joseph, to see this late accomplishment of his ancient dream; to see these suppliants (I know not whether more brethren or enemies) grovelling before him in an unknown submission; and now it doth him good to seem merciless to them, whom he had found wilfully cruel: to hide his love from them which had showed their hate to him, and to think how much he favoureth them, and how little they knew it: and as, sporting himself in their seeming misery, he pleasantly imitates all those actions reciprocally unto them, which they in despite and earnest had done formerly to him; he speaks roughly, rejects their persuasions, puts them in hold, and one of them in bonds. The mind must not always be judged by the outward face of the actions. God's countenance is ofttimes as severe, and his hand as heavy to them whom he best loveth. Many a one, under the habit of an Egyptian, hath the heart of an Israelite. No song could be so delightful to him, as to hear them, in a late remorse, condemn themselves before him, of their old cruelty towards him, who was now their unknown witness and judge.

Nothing doth so powerfully call home the conscience as affliction, neither need there any other art of memory for sin, besides misery. They had heard Joseph's deprecation of their evil with tears and had not pitied him; yet Joseph doth but hear their mention of this evil which they had done against him, and pities them with tears: he weeps for joy to see their repentance, and to compare his safety and happiness with the cruelty which they intended, and did, and thought they had done.

Yet he can abide to see his brother his prisoner, whom no bonds could bind so strong, as his affection bound him to his captive. Simeon is left in pawn, in fetters; the rest return with their corn, with their money, paying nothing for their provision but their labour; that they might be as much troubled with the beneficence of that strange Egyptian lord, as before with his imperious suspicion. Their wealth was now more irksome to them than their need; and they fear God means to punish them more in this superfluity of money, than in the want of victuals. "What is this that God hath done to us?" It is a wise course to be jealous of our gain; and more to fear, than desire abundance.

Old Jacob, that was not used to simple and absolute contentments, receives the blessing of seasonable provision, together with the affliction of that heavy message, the loss of one son, and the danger of another; and knows not whether it be better for him to die with hunger, or with grief, for the departure of that son of his right hand. He drives off all till the last. Protraction is a kind of ease in evils that must come.

At length (as no plea is so importunate as that of famine) Benjamin must go: one evil must be hazarded for the redress of another. What would it avail him, to see whom he loved miserable? How injurious were that affection, to keep his son so long in his eye, till they should see each other die for hunger!

The ten brothers return into Egypt, loaded with double money in their sacks, and a present in their hands: the danger of mistaking is requited, by honest minds, with more than restitution. It is not enough to find our own hearts clear in suspicious actions, except we satisfy others. Now hath Joseph what he would, the sight and presence of his Benjamin, whom he therefore borrows of his father for a time, that he might return him with a greater interest of joy: and now he feasts them whom he formerly threatened, and turns their fear into wonder. All unequal love is not partial; all the brethren are entertained bountifully, but Benjamin hath a fivefold portion. By how much his welcome was greater, by so much his pretended theft seemed more heinous; for good turns aggravate unkindness, and our offences are increased with our obligations. How easy is it to find advantages, where there is a purpose to accuse! Benjamin's sack makes him guilty of that whereof his heart was free. Crimes seem strange to the innocent. Well might they abjure this fact, with the offer of bondage and death: for they, which carefully brought again that which they might have taken, would never take that which was not given them. But thus Joseph would yet dally with his brethren, and make Benjamin a thief, that he might make him a servant, and fright his brethren with the peril of that their charge, that he might double their joy and amazedness, in giving them two brothers at once. Our happiness is greater and sweeter, when we have well feared and smarted with evils.

But now when Judah seriously reported the danger of his old father, and the sadness of his last complaint, compassion and joy will be concealed no longer, but break forth violently at his voice and eyes. Many passions do not well abide witnesses, because they are guilty to their own weakness. Joseph sends forth his servants, that he might freely weep. He knew he could not say I am Joseph, without an unbeseeming vehemence.

Never any word sounded so strangely as this in the ears of the patriarchs. Wonder, doubt, reverence, joy, fear, hope, guiltiness, struck them at once. It was time for Joseph to say, "Fear not:" no marvel if they stood with paleness and silence before him, looking on him, and on each other. The more they considered, they wondered more; and the more they believed the more they feared. For these words, "I am Joseph," seemed to sound thus much to their guilty thoughts,—You are murderers, and I am a prince in spite of you. My power, and this place, give me all opportunities of revenge: my glory is your shame, my life your danger, your sins live together with me. But now the tears and gracious words of Joseph have soon assured them of pardon and love, and have bidden them turn their eyes from their sin against their brother, to their happiness in him, and have changed their doubts into hopes and joys, causing them to look upon him without fear, though not without shame. His loving embracements clear their hearts of all jealousies, and hasten to put new thoughts into them of favour, and of greatness; so that now forgetting what evil they did to their brother, they are thinking of what good their brother may do to them. Actions, salved up with a free forgiveness, are as not done: and as a bone once broken is stronger after well setting, so is love after reconcilement.

But as wounds once healed leave a scar behind them, so remitted injuries leave commonly in the actors a guilty remembrance, which hindered these brethren from that freedom of joy, which else they had conceived. This was their fault, not Joseph's, who strives to give them all security of his love, and will be as bountiful as they were cruel. They send him naked to strangers, he sends them in new and rich liveries to their father; they took a small sum of money for him, he gives them great treasures; they sent his torn coat to his father, he sends variety of costly raiments to his father, by them; they sold him to be the load of camels, he sends them home with chariots. It must be a great favour, that can appease the conscience of a great injury. Now they return home rich and joyful, making themselves happy to think how glad they should make their father with this news.

That good old man would never have hoped, that Egypt could have afforded such provision as this; "Joseph is yet alive." This was not food, but life to him. The return of Benjamin was comfortable; but that his dead son was yet alive, after so many years' lamentation, was tidings too happy to be believed, and was enough to endanger that life with excess of joy, which the knowledge thereof doubled. Over excellent objects are dangerous in their sudden apprehensions. One grain of that joy would have safely cheered him, whereof a full measure overlays his heart with too much sweetness. There is no earthly pleasure whereof we may not surfeit: of the spiritual we can never have enough.

Yet his eyes revive his mind, which his ears had thus astonished. When he saw the chariots of his son he believed Joseph's life, and refreshed his own. He had too much before, so that he could not enjoy it: now he saith, "I have enough; Joseph my son is yet alive."

They told him of his honour, he speaks of his life: life is better than honour. To have heard that Joseph lived a servant, would have joyed him more, than to hear that he died honourably. The greater blessing obscures the less. He is not worthy of honour, that is not thankful for life.

Yet Joseph's life did not content Jacob, without his presence: "I will go down and see him, ere I die." The sight of the eye is better than to walk in desires. Good things' pleasure is not in their being, but in our enjoying.

The height of all earthly contentment appeared in the meeting of these two, whom their mutual loss had more endeared to each other. The intermission of comforts hath this advantage, that it sweetens our delight more in the return, than was abated in the forbearance. God doth ofttimes hide away our Joseph for a time, that we may be more joyous and thankful in his recovery. This was the sincerest pleasure that ever Jacob had, which therefore God reserved for his old age.

And if the meeting of earthly friends be so unspeakably comfortable, how happy shall we be in the light of the glorious face of God our heavenly Father! of that our blessed Redeemer, whom we sold to death by our sins; and which now after that noble triumph, hath all power given him in heaven and earth!

Thus did Jacob rejoice, when he was to go out of the land of promise to a foreign nation, for Joseph's sake; being glad that he should lose his country for his son. What shall our joy be, who must go out of this foreign land of our pilgrimage, to the home of our glorious inheritance, to dwell with none but our own, in that better and more lightsome Goshen, free from all the encumbrances of this Egypt, and full of all the riches and delights of God! The guilty conscience can never think itself safe: so many years' experience of Joseph's love could not secure his brethren of remission. Those that know they have deserved ill, are wont to misinterpret favours, and think they cannot be beloved. All that while, his goodness seemed but concealed and sleeping malice, which they feared in their father's last sleep would awake, and bewray itself in revenge: still therefore they plead the name of their father, though dead, not daring to use their own. Good meanings cannot be more wronged than with suspicion. It grieves Joseph to see their fear, and to find they had not forgotten their own sin, and to hear them so passionately crave that which they had.

"Forgive the trespass of the servants of thy father's God." What a conjuration of pardon was this! What wound could be either so deep, or so festered, as this plaster could not cure! They say not, the sons of thy father, for they knew Jacob was dead, and they had degenerated; but the servants of thy father's God. How much stronger are the bonds of religion than of nature! If Joseph had been rancorous, this deprecation had charmed him; but now it dissolves him into tears: they are not so ready to acknowledge their old offence, as he to protest his love; and if he chide them for any thing, it is for that they thought they needed to entreat; since they might know it could not stand with the fellow-servant of their father's God to harbour maliciousness, to purpose revenge. "Am not I under God?" And, fully to secure them, he turns their eyes from themselves to the decree of God, from the action to the event; as one that would have them think, there was no cause to repent of that which proved so successful.

Even late confession finds forgiveness. Joseph had long ago seen their sorrow, never but now heard he their humble acknowledgment. Mercy stays not for outward solemnities. How much more shall that infinite goodness pardon our sins, when he finds the truth of our repentance!

BOOK IV.

CONTEMPLATION I.—OF THE AFFLICTION OF ISRAEL.

EGYPT was long an harbour to the Israelites; now it proves a jail: the posterity of Jacob finds too late, what it was for their forefathers to sell Joseph a slave into Egypt. Those whom the Egyptians honoured before as lords, now they contemn as drudges. One Pharaoh advances, whom another labours to depress. Not seldom the same man changes copies: but if favours outlive one age, they prove decrepit and heartless. It is a rare thing to find posterity heirs of their father's love. How should men's favour be but like themselves, variable and inconstant? There is no certainty but in the favour of God, in whom can be no change, whose love is intailed upon a thousand generations.

Yet if the Israelites had been treacherous to Pharaoh, if disobedient, this great change of countenance had been just: now the only offence of Israel is, that he prospereth. That which should be the motive of their gratulation and friendship, is the cause of their malice. There is no more hateful sight to a wicked man, than the prosperity of the conscionable. None but the Spirit of that true harbinger of Christ, can teach us to say with contentment, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

And what if Israel be mighty and rich? "If there be war, they may join with our enemies, and get them out of the land." Behold, they are afraid to part with those whom they are grieved to entertain: either staying or going is offence enough to those that seek quarrels: there were no wars, and yet they say, If there be wars. The Israelites had never given cause of fear to revolt, and yet they say, "Lest they join to our enemies," to those enemies which we may have: so they make their certain friends slaves for fear of uncertain enemies. Wickedness is ever cowardly, and full of unjust suspicions; it makes a man fear, where no fear is: fly, when none pursues him. What difference there is betwixt David and Pharaoh! The faith of the one says, "I will not be afraid for ten thousand that should beset me:" the fear of the other says, "Lest, if there be war, they join with our enemies;" therefore should he have made much of the Israelites, that they might be his: his favour might have made them firm. Why might they not as well draw their swords for him?

Weak and base minds ever incline to the worse, and seek safety rather in an impossibility of hurt, than in the likelihood of just advantage. Favours had been more binding than cruelties: yet the foolish Egyptian had rather have impotent servants, than able friends. For their welfare alone Pharaoh owes Israel a mischief; and how will he pay it?

"Come let us work wisely." Lewd men call wicked policies wisdom, and their success happiness. Herein Satan is wiser than they, who both lays the plot, and makes them such fools as to mistake villany and madness for the best virtue.

Injustice is upheld by violence, whereas just governments are maintained by love. Task-masters must be set over Israel; they should not be the true seed of Israel, if they were not still set to wrestle with God in afflictions: heavy burdens must be laid upon them. Israel is never but loaded · the destiny of one of Jacob's sons is common to all, to lie down betwixt their burdens. If they had seemed to breathe them in Goshen sometimes, yet even there it was no small misery to be foreigners, and to live among idolaters; but now the name of a slave is added to the name of a stranger. Israel hath gathered some rust in idolatrous Egypt, and now he must be scoured: they had borne the burden of God's anger, if they had not borne the burdens of the Egyptians.

As God afflicted them with another mind than the Egyptians (God to exercise them, the Egyptians to suppress them), so causes he the event to differ. Who would not have thought with these Egyptians, that so extreme misery should not have made the Israelites unfit, both for generation and resistance? Moderate exercise strengthens, extreme destroys nature: that God, which many times works by contrary means, caused them to grow with depression, with persecution to multiply. How can God's church but fare well, since the very malice of their enemies benefits them! Oh the sovereign goodness of our God, that turns all our poisons into cordials! God's vine bears the better with bleeding.

And now the Egyptians could be angry with their own maliciousness, that this was the occasion of multiplying them whom they hated and feared; to see that this service gained more to the workmen than to their masters: the stronger therefore the Israelites grew, the more impotent grew the malice of their persecutors. And since their own labour strengthens them, now tyranny will try what can be done by the violence of others. Since the present strength cannot be subdued, the hopes of succession must be prevented: women must be suborned to be murderers; and those whose office is to help the birth, must destroy it.

There was less suspicion of cruelty in that sex, and more opportunity of doing mischief. The male children must be born, and die at once. What can be more innocent than the child that hath not lived so much as to cry, or to see light? It is fault enough to be the son of an Israelite. The daughters may live for bondage, for lust; a condition so much (at the least) worse than death, as their sex was weaker. O marvellous cruelty, that a man should kill a man for his sex's sake! Whosoever hath loosed the reins unto cruelty, is easily carried into incredible extremities.

From burdens they proceed to bondage, and from bondage to blood: from an unjust vexation of their body, to an inhuman destruction of the fruit of their body. As the sins of the concupiscible part, from slight motions, grow on to foul executions, so do those of the irascible. There is no sin whose harbour is more unsafe than that of malice: but ofttimes the power of tyrants answers not their will. Evil commanders cannot always meet with equally mischievous agents.

The fear of God teaches the midwives to disobey an unjust command; they well knew how no excuse it is for evil, I was bidden. God said to their hearts, "Thou shalt not kill." This voice was louder than Pharaoh's. I commend their obedience in disobeying; I dare not commend their excuse. There was as much weakness in their answer, as strength in their practice: as they feared God in not killing, so they feared Pharaoh in dissembling. Ofttimes those that make conscience of greater sins are overtaken with less. It is well and rare, if we can come forth of a dangerous action without any soil; and if we have escaped the storm, that some after-drops wet us not.

Who would not have expected that the midwives should be murdered, for not murdering? Pharaoh could not be so simple to think these women trusty; yet his indignation had no power to reach to their punishment. God prospered the midwives: who can harm them? Even the not doing of evil is rewarded with good. And why did they prosper? Because they feared God; not for their dissimulation, but their piety; so did God regard their mercy, that he regarded not their infirmity. How fondly do men lay the thank upon the sin, which is due to the virtue. True wisdom teaches to distinguish God's actions, and to ascribe them to the right causes: pardon belongs to the lie of the midwives, and remuneration to their goodness; prosperity to their fear of God.

But that which the midwives will not, the multitude shall do. It were strange if wicked rulers should not find some or other instruments of violence: all the people must drown whom the women saved: cruelty hath but smoked before, now it flames up; secret practising hath made it shameless, that now it dare proclaim tyranny. It is a miserable state, where every man is made an executioner. There can be no greater argument of an ill cause, than a bloody persecution; whereas truth upholds herself by mildness, and is promoted by patience. This is their act, what was their issue? The people must drown their males, themselves are drowned: they die by the same means by which they caused the Israelitish infants to die. That law of retaliation which God will not allow to us, because we are fellow-creatures, he justly practiseth in us. God would have us read our sins in our judgments, that we might both repent of our sins and give glory to his justice.

Pharaoh raged before; much more now, that he received a message of dismission. The monitions of God make ill men worse: the waves do not beat, nor roar any where so much as at the bank which restrains them. Corruption, when it is checked, grows mad with rage: as the vapour in a cloud would not make that fearful report, if it met not with opposition. A good heart yields at the stillest voice of God: but the most gracious motions of God harden the wicked. Many would not be so desperately settled in their sins, if the world had not controlled them. How mild a message was this to Pharaoh, and yet how galling! "We pray thee let us go." God commands him that which he feared. He took pleasure in the present servitude of Israel: God calls for a release. If the suit had been for mitigation of labour, for preservation of their children, it might have carried some hope, and have found some favour: but now God requires that which he knows will as much discontent Pharaoh, as Pharaoh's cruelty could discontent the Israelites; "Let us go." How contrary are God's precepts to natural minds! And indeed, as they love to cross him in their practice, so he loves to cross them in their commands before, and his punishments afterwards. It is a dangerous sign of an ill heart to feel God's yoke heavy.

Moses talks of sacrifice. Pharaoh talks of work. Any thing seems due work to a carnal mind, saving God's service; nothing superfluous, but religious duties. Christ tells us, there is but one thing necessary; nature tells us, there is nothing but that needless: Moses speaks of devotion, Pharaoh of idleness. It hath been an old use, as to cast fair colours upon our own vicious actions, so to cast evil aspersions upon the good actions of others. The same devil that spoke in Pharaoh, speaks still in our scoffers, and calls religion hypocrisy; conscionable care, singularity. Every vice hath a title, and every virtue a disgrace.

Yet while possible tasks were imposed, there was some comfort: their diligence might save their back from stripes. The conceit of a benefit to the commander, and hope of impunity to the labourer, might give a good pretence to great difficulties. But to require tasks not feasible is tyrannical, and doth only pick a quarrel to punish. They could neither make straw, nor find it, yet they must have it. Do what may be, is tolerable; but do what cannot be, is cruel. Those which are above others in place, must measure their commands, not by their own wills, but by the strength of their inferiors. To require more of a beast than he can do, is inhuman. The task is not done; the task-masters are beaten: the punishment lies where the charge is: they must exact it of the people, Pharaoh of them. It is the misery of those which are trusted with authority, that their inferiors' faults are beaten upon their backs. This was not the fault to require it of the task-masters, but to require it by the task-masters of the people. Public persons do either good or ill with a thousand hands, and with no fewer shall receive it.

CONTEMPLATION II.—OF THE BIRTH AND BREEDING OF MOSES.

It is a wonder that Amram, the father of Moses, would think of the marriage-bed in so troublesome a time, when he knew he should beget children either to slavery or slaughter Yet even now, in the heat of this bondage, he marries Ichabod. The drowning of his sons was not so great an evil, as his own burning; the thraldom of his daughters not so great an evil, as the subjection unto sinful desires. He therefore uses God's remedy for his sin, and refers the sequel of his danger to God. How necessary is this intimation for those which have not the power of containing! Perhaps he would have thought it better to live childless: but Amram and Ichabod durst not incur the danger of a sin, to avoid the danger of a mischief. No doubt when Ichabod, the mother of Moses, saw a man-child born of her, and him beautiful and comely, she fell into extreme passion, to think that the executioner's hand should succeed the midwife's. All the time of her conception, she could not but fear a son; now she sees him, and thinks of his birth and death at once: her second throes are more grievous than her first. The pains of travail in others are somewhat mitigated with hope, and countervailed with joy, that a man-child is born; in her they are doubled with fear. The remedy of others is her complaint. Still she looks when some fierce Egyptian would come in, and snatch her new-born infant out of her bosom, whose comeliness had now also added to her affection.

Many times God writes presages of majesty and honour, even in the faces of children. Little did she think that she held in her lap the deliverer of Israel. It is good to hazard in greatest appearances of danger. If Ichabod had said, If I bear a son, they will kill him; where had been the great rescuer of Israel? Happy is that resolution which can follow God hoodwinked, and let him dispose of the event. When she can no longer hide him in her womb, she hides him in her house, afraid lest every one of his cryings should guide the executioners to his cradle. And now she sees her treasure can be no longer hid, she ships him in a bark of bulrushes, and commits him to the mercy of the waves, and (which was more merciless) to the danger of an Egyptian passenger, yet doth she not leave him without a guardian.

No tyranny can forbid her to love him whom she is forbidden to keep. Her daughter's eyes must supply the place of her arms. And if the weak affection of a mother were thus effectually careful, what shall we think of Him whose love, whose compassion, is (as himself) infinite? His eye, his hand, cannot but be with us, even when we forsake ourselves. Moses had never a stronger protection about him, no, not when all his Israelites were pitched about his tent in the wilderness, than now when he lay sprawling alone upon the waves: no water, no Egyptian can hurt him. Neither friend nor mother dare own him, and now God challenges his custody. When we seem most neglected and forlorn in ourselves, then is God most present, most vigilant.

His providence brings Pharaoh's daughter thither to wash herself. Those times looked for no great state: a princess comes to bathe herself in the open stream. She meant only to wash herself: God fetches her thither to deliver the deliverer of his people. His designs go beyond ours. We know not (when we set our foot over our threshold) what he hath to do with us. This event seemed casual to this princess, but predetermined and provided by God before she was. How wisely and sweetly God brings to pass his own purposes, in our ignorance and regardlessness! She saw the ark, opens it, finds the child weeping: his beauty and his tears had God provided for the strong persuasions of mercy. This young and lively oratory prevailed. Her heart is struck with compassion, and yet her tongue could say, "It is a Hebrew child."

See here the merciful daughter of a cruel father. It is an uncharitable and injurious ground, to judge of the child's disposition by the parent's. How well doth pity beseem great personages, and most in extremities. It had been death to another to rescue the child of a Hebrew; in her it was safe and noble. It is a happy thing when great ones improve their places to so much more charity, as their liberty is more.

Moses' sister finding the princess compassionate, offers to procúre a nurse, and fetches the mother: and who can be so fit a nurse as a mother? She now with glad hands receives her child, both with authority and reward. She would have given all her substance for the life of her son; and now she hath a reward to nurse him. The exchange of the name of a mother for the name of a nurse, hath gained her both her son and his education, and with both a recompense. Religion doth not call us to a weak simplicity, but allows us as much of the serpent as of the dove. Lawful policies have from God both liberty in the use, and blessing in the success.

The good lady did not breed him as some child of alms, or as some wretched outcast, for whom it might be favour enough to live, but as her own son, in all the delicacies, in all the learning of Egypt. Whatsoever the court or the school could put into him, he wanted not; yet all this could not make him forget that he was a Hebrew. Education works wondrous changes, and is of great force either way. A little advancement hath so puffed some up above themselves, that they have not only forgot their friends, but scorned their parents. All the honours of Egypt could not win Moses not to call his nurse mother, or wean him from a willing misery with the Israelites. If we had Moses' faith, we could not but make his choice. It is only our infidelity that binds us so to the world, and makes us prefer the momentary pleasures of sin unto that everlasting recompense of reward.

He went forth, and looked on the burdens of Israel. What needed Moses to have afflicted himself with the afflictions of others? Himself was at ease and pleasure in the court of Pharaoh. A good heart cannot endure to be happy alone, and must needs, unbidden, share with others in their miseries. He is no true Moses that is not moved with the calamities of God's church. To see an Egyptian smite a Hebrew, it smote him, and moved him to smite. He hath no Israelitish blood in him that can endure to see an Israelite stricken either with hand or tongue.

Here was his zeal: where was his authority? Doubtless, Moses had an instinct from God of his magistracy, else how should he think they would have understood what himself did not? Oppressions may not be righted by violence, but by law. The redress of evil by a person unwarranted, is evil. Moses knew that God had called him, he knew that Pharaoh knew it not, therefore he hides the Egyptian in the sand. Those actions which may be approved unto God, are not always safe with men: as contrarily, too many things go current with men, which are not approved of God.

Another Hebrew is stricken, but by a Hebrew: the act is the same, the agents differ; neither doth their profession more differ than Moses' proceedings. He gives blows to the one, to the other words. The blows to the Egyptian were deadly; the words to the Hebrew gentle and plausible. As God makes a difference betwixt the chastisements of his own and punishments of strange children, so must wise governors learn to distinguish of sins and judgments according to circumstances. How mildly doth Moses admonish! "Sirs, ye are brethren." If there had been any dram of good nature in these Hebrews, they had relented; now it is strange to see, that being so universally vexed with their common adversary, they should yet vex one another. One would have thought that a common opposition should have united them more; yet now private grudges do thus dangerously divide them. Blows enough were not dealt by the Egyptians, their own must add to the violence. Still Satan is thus busy, and Christians are thus malicious, that (as if they wanted enemies) they fly on one another's faces. While we are in this Egypt of the world, all unkind strifes would easily be composed, if we did not forget that we are brethren.

Behold an Egyptian in the skin of an Hebrew: how dogged an answer doth Moses receive to so gentle a reproof! Who would have expected that this Hebrew had been enough dejected with the common affliction? But vexations may make some more miserable, not more humble; as we see sicknesses make some tractable, others more froward. It is no easy matter to bear a reproof well, if never so well tempered. No sugar can bereave a pill of its bitterness. None but the gracious can say, "Let the righteous smite me." Next to the not deserving a reproof, is the well taking of it. But who is so ready to except and exclaim as the wrong doer? The patient replies not. One injury draws on another, first to his brother, then to his reprover. Guiltiness will make a man stir upon every touch. He that was wronged could incline to reconciliation. Malice makes men incapable of good counsel; and there are none so great enemies to justice as those who are enemies to peace.

With what impatience doth a galled heart receive an admonition! This unworthy Israelite is the pattern of a stomachful offender: first he is moved to choler in himself, then he calls for the authority of the admonisher. A small authority will serve for a loving admonition. It is the duty of men, much more of Christians, to advise against sin; yet this man asks, "Who made thee a judge?" for but finding fault with his injury. Then he aggravates and misconstrues, "Wilt thou kill me?" when Moses meant only to save both. It was the death of his malice only that was intended, and the safety of his person. And, lastly, he upbraids him with former actions; "Thou killedst the Egyptian." What if he did? what if unjustly? What was this to the Hebrew? Another man's sin is no excuse for ours. A wicked heart never looks inward to itself, but outward to the quality of the reprover: if that afford exception, it is enough; as a dog runs first to avenge on the stone. What matter is it to me who he be that admonisheth me? Let me look home into myself: let me look to his advice. If that be good, it is more shame to me to be reproved by an evil man. As a good man's allowance cannot warrant evil, so an evil man's reproof may remedy evil. If this Hebrew had been well pleased, Moses had not heard of his slaughter; now in choler all will out; and if this man's tongue had not thus cast him in the teeth with blood, he had been surprised by Pharaoh, ere he could have known that the fact was known.

Now he grows jealous, flees, and escapes. No friend is so commodious, in some cases, as an adversary. This wound, which the Hebrew thought to give Moses, saved his life. As it is good for a man to have an enemy, so it shall be our wisdom to make use of his most choleric objections. The worst of an enemy may prove most sovereign to ourselves. Moses flees. It is no discomfort for a man to flee when his conscience pursues him not. Where God's warrant will not protect us, it is good for the heels to supply the place of the tongue.

Moses, when he may not in Egypt, he will be doing justice in Midian. In Egypt, he delivers the oppressed Israelite; in Midian the wronged daughters of Jethro. A good man will be doing good, wheresoever he is: his trade is a compound of charity and justice. As therefore evil dispositions cannot be changed with airs, no more will good. Now then he sits him down by a well in Midian. There he might have to drink, but where to eat he knew not. The case was altered with Moses; to come from the dainties of the court of Egypt, to the hunger of the fields of Midian. It is a lesson that all God's children must learn to take out, to want, and to abound. Who can think strange of penury, when the great governor of God's people once had nothing? Who would not have thought, in this case, Moses should have been heartless and sullen; so cast down with his own complaints, that he should have had no feeling of others: yet how hot is he upon justice! No adversity can make a good man neglect good duties. He sees the oppression of the shepherds, the image of that other he left behind him in Egypt. The maids (daughters of so great a peer) draw water for their flocks; the inhuman shepherds drive them away. Rudeness hath no respect, either to sex or condition. If we lived not under laws, this were our case: might would be the measure of justice. We should not so much as enjoy our own water. Unjust courses will not ever prosper. Moses shall rather come from Egypt to Midian to beat the shepherds, than they shall vex the daughters of Jethro. This act of justice was not better done than taken. Reuel requites it kindly with an hospitable entertainment. A good nature is ready to answer courtesies: we cannot do too much for a thankful man. And if a courteous heathen reward the watering of a sheep in this bountiful manner, how shall our God recompense but a cup of cold water that is given to a disciple? This favour hath won Moses, who now consents to dwell with him, though out of the church. Curiosity, or whatsoever idle occasions, may not draw us (for our residence) out of the bounds of the church of God; danger of life may. We love not the church if we easily leave it: if in a case of life, we leave it not (upon opportunity) for a time of respite, we love not ourselves. The first part of Moses' requital was his wife, one of those whom he had formerly protected.

I do not so much marvel that Jethro gave him his daughter, (for he saw him valiant, wise, learned, nobly bred) as that Moses would take her; a stranger both in blood and religion. I could plead for him necessity: his own nation was shut up to him. If he would have tried to fetch a daughter of Israel, he had endangered to leave himself behind. I could plead some correspondence in common principles of religion; for doubtless Moses' zeal could not suffer him to smother the truth in himself: he should have been an unfaithful servant, if he had not been his master's teacher. Yet neither of these can make this match either safe or good. The event bewrays it dangerously inconvenient. This choice had like to have cost him dear: she stood in his way for circumcision; God stands in his way for revenge. Though he was now in God's message, yet might he not be forborn in this neglect. No circumstance either of the dearness of the solicitor, or our own engagement, can bear out a sin with God. Those, which are unequally yoked, may not ever look to draw one way. True love to the person cannot long agree with dislike of the religion. He had need to be more than a man, that hath a Zipporah in his bosom, and would have true zeal in his heart. All this while Moses' affection was not so tied to Midian, that he could forget Egypt. He was a stranger in Midian: what was he else in Egypt? Surely either Egypt was not his home, or a miserable one; and yet, in reference to it, he calls his son Gershom, a stranger there. Much better were it to be a stranger there, than a dweller in Egypt. How hardly can we forget the place of our abode or education, although never so homely: and if he so thought of his Egyptian home, where was nothing but bondage and tyranny, how should we think of that home of ours, above, where is nothing but rest and blessedness?

CONTEMPLATION III.—OF MOSES' CALLING.

Forty years was Moses a courtier, and forty years (after that) a shepherd. That great men may not be ashamed of honest vocations, the greatest that ever were have been content to take up with mean trades. The contempt of honest callings, in those which are well-born, argues pride without wit. How constantly did Moses stick to his hook! and yet a man of great spirits, of excellent learning, of curious education; and, if God had not (after his forty years' service) called him off, he had so ended his days. Humble resolutions are so much more heroical, as they fall into higher subjects.

There can be no fitter disposition for a leader of God's people, than constancy in his undertakings, without either weariness or change. How had he learned to subdue all ambitious desires, and to rest content with his obscurity! So he might have the freedom of his thoughts, and full opportunity of holy meditations, he willingly leaves the world to others, and envies not his proudest acquaintance of the court of Pharaoh. He that hath true worth in himself, and familiarity with God, finds more pleasure in the deserts of Midian, than others can do in the palaces of kings.

While he is tending his sheep, God appeared unto him. God never graces the idle with his visions. When he finds us in our callings, we find him in the tokens of his mercy. Satan appears to the idle man in manifold temptations; or rather presents himself, and appears not. God was ever with Moses, yet was he not seen till now. He is never absent from his; but sometimes he makes their senses witnesses of his presence. In small matters may be greater wonders. That a bush should burn, is no marvel; but that it should not consume in burning, is justly miraculous. God chooseth not ever great subjects wherein to exercise his power; it is enough that his power is great in the smallest. When I look upon this burning bush with Moses, methinks I can never see a worthier and more lively emblem of the church: that Egypt was in the furnace, yet wasted not. Since then, how oft hath it been flaming, never consumed! The same power that enlightens it, preserves it; and to none but his enemies is he a consuming fire. Moses was a great philosopher: but small skill would have served to know the nature of fire, and of the bush; that fire meeting with combustible matter, could not but consume. If it had been some solid wood, it would have yielded later to the flame; but bushes are of so quick despatch, that the joy of the wicked is compared to a fire of thorns. He noted a while, saw it continued, and began to wonder. It was some marvel how it should come there: but how it should continue without supply, yea, without diminution of matter, was truly admirable. Doubtless he went oft about it, and viewed it on all sides; and now, when his eye and mind could meet with no likely causes so far off, resolves, I will go see it. His curiosity led him nearer; and what could he see but a bush in a flame, which he saw at first unsatisfied? It is good to come to the place of God's presence, howsoever: God may perhaps speak to thy heart, though thou come but for novelty. Even those which have come upon curiosity, have been oft taken. Absence is without hope. If Moses had not come, he had not been called out of the bush.

To see a fire not consuming the bush, was much: but to hear a speaking fire, this was more; and to hear his own name out of the mouth of the fire, it was most of all. God makes way for his greatest messages by astonishment and admiration; as, on the contrary, carelessness carries us to a mere unproficiency under the best means of God. If our hearts were more awful, God's messages would be more effectual to us.

In that appearance, God meant to call Moses to come; yet when he is come, inhibits him—"Come not hither." We must come to God; we must not come too near him. When we meditate of the great mysteries of his word, we come to him. We come too near him when we search into his counsels. The sun and the fire say of themselves, Come not too near; how much more the light which none can attain unto? We have all our limits set us. The Gentiles might come into some outer courts, not into the inmost; the Jews might come into the inner court, not into the temple; the priests and Levites into the temple, not into the holy of holies; Moses to the hill, not to the bush. The waves of the sea had not more need of bounds than man's presumption. Moses must not come close to the bush at all; and, where he may stand, he may not stand with his shoes on. There is no unholiness in clothes. God prepared them for man at first, and that of skins, lest any exception should be taken at the hides of dead beasts. This rite was significant. What are the shoes but worldly and carnal affections? If these be not cast off when we come to the holy place, we make ourselves unholy. How much less should we dare to come with resolutions of sin? This is not only to come with shoes on, but with shoes bemired with wicked filthiness; the touch whereof profanes the pavement of God, and makes our presence odious.

Moses was the son of Amram, Amram of Kohath, Kohath of Levi,

Levi of Jacob, Jacob of Isaac, Isaac of Abraham. God puts together both ends of his pedigree; "I am the God of thy father, and of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob." If he had said only, I am thy God, it had been Moses' duty to attend awfully; but now, that he says, "I am the God of thy father, and of Abraham," &c., he challenges reverence by prescription. Any thing that was our ancestors' pleases us; their houses, their vessels, their coat-armour; how much more their God! How careful should parents be to make holy choices! Every precedent of theirs are so many monuments and motives to their posterity. What a happiness it is to be born of good parents! Hence God claims an interest in us, and we in him, for their sake. As many a man smarteth for his father's sin, so the goodness of others is crowned in a thousand generations. Neither doth God say, I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob:—but I am. The patriarchs still live after so many thousand years of dissolution. No length of time can separate the souls of the just from their Maker. As for their body, there is still a real relation betwixt the dust of it and the soul; and if the being of this part be more defective, the being of the other is more lively, and doth more than recompense the wants of that earthly half.

God could not describe himself by a more sweet name than this—"I am the God of thy father, and of Abraham," &c. Yet Moses hides his face for fear. If he had said, I am the glorious God that made heaven and earth, that dwells in light inaccessible, whom the angels cannot behold; or, I am God the avenger just and terrible, a consuming fire to mine enemies; here had been just cause of terror.

But, why was Moses so frighted with a familiar compellation? God is no less awful to his own in his very mercies, (great is thy mercy that thou mayest be feared!) for to them no less majesty shines in the favours of God, than in his judgments and justice. The wicked heart never fears God, but thundering or shaking the earth, or raining fire from heaven; but the good can dread him in his very sunshine: his loving deliverances and blessings affect them with awfulness. Moses was the true son of Jacob, who, when he saw nothing but visions of love and mercy, could say, "How dreadful is this place!"

I see Moses now at the bush, hiding his face at so mild a representation; hereafter we shall see him in this very mount, betwixt heaven and earth, in thunder, lightning, smoke, earthquakes, speaking mouth to mouth with God, barefaced and fearless. God was then more terrible, but Moses was less strange. This was his first meeting with God: further acquaintance makes him familiar, and familiarity makes him bold. Frequency of conversation gives us freedom of access to God, and makes us pour out our hearts to him as fully and as fearlessly as to our friends. In the meantime, now at first he made not so much haste to see, but he made as much haste to hide his eyes. Twice did Moses hide his face; once for the glory which God put upon him, which made him so shine that he could not be beheld of others; once for God's own glory which he could not behold. No marvel. Some of the creatures are too glorious for mortal eyes; how much more, when God appears to us in the easiest manner, must his glory needs overcome us! Behold the difference betwixt our present and future estate. Then the more majesty of appearance, the more delight. When our sin is quite gone, all our fear at

God's presence shall be turned into joy. God appeared to Adam before his sin with comfort, but in the same form, which, after his sin, was terrible. And if Moses cannot abide to look upon God's glory, when he descends to us in mercy, how shall wicked ones abide to see his fearful presence when he sets upon vengeance! In this fire he flamed, and consumed not; but in his revenge, our God is a consuming fire.

First, Moses hides himself in fear, now in modesty. "Who am I?" None in all Egypt or Midian was comparably fit for this embassage. Which of the Israelites had been brought up a courtier, a scholar, an Israelite by blood, by education an Egyptian, learned, wise, valiant, experienced? Yet, "Who am I?" The more fit any man is for whatsoever vocation, the less he thinks himself. Forwardness argues insufficiency. The unworthy thinks still, Who am I not? Modest beginnings give hopeful proceedings and happy endings. Once before, Moses had taken upon him, and laid about him; hoping then they would have known, that by his hand God meant to deliver Israel: but now, when it comes to the point, "Who am I?" God's best servants are not ever in an equal disposition to good duties. If we find differences in ourselves sometimes, it argues that grace is not our own. It is our frailty that those services which we are forward to aloof off, we shrink at near hand, and fearfully misgive. How many of us can bid defiances to death, and suggest answers to absent temptations, which, when they come home to us, we fly off, and change our note, and, instead of action, expostulate!

CONTEMPLATION IV.—THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT.

It is too much honour for flesh and blood to receive a message from heaven; yet here God sends a message to man and is repulsed. Well may God ask, Who is man, that I should regard him? But for man to ask, Who is the Lord? is a proud and a bold blasphemy. Thus wild is nature at the first; but ere God hath done with Pharaoh, he will be known of him, he will make himself known by him to all the world. God might have swept him away suddenly. How unworthy is he of life, who with the same breath that he receives, denies the giver of it! But he would have him convinced, ere he was punished. First, therefore, he works miracles before him, then upon him. Pharaoh was now, from a staff of protection and sustentation to God's people, turned to a serpent that stung them to death. God shows himself, in this real emblem, doing that suddenly before him, which Satan had wrought in him by leisure: and now, when he crawls, and winds, and hisses, threatening peril to Israel, he shows him how in an instant he can turn him into a senseless stick, and make him, if not useful, yet fearless. The same God which wrought this, gives Satan leave to imitate it. The first plague that he meant to inflict upon Pharaoh, is delusion. God can be content the devil should win himself credit, where he means to judge; and holds the honour of a miracle well lost, to harden an enemy: yet, to show that his miracle was of power, the other's of permission, Moses' serpent devours theirs. How easily might the Egyptians have thought, that he which caused their serpent not to be, could have kept it from being: and that they, which could not keep their serpent from devouring, could not secure them from being consumed! But wise thoughts enter not into those that must perish. All God's judgments stand ready, and wait but till they be called for. They need but a watch-word to be given them. No sooner is the rod lift up, but they are gone forth into the world: presently the waters run into blood; the frogs and lice crawl about, and all the other troops of God come rushing in upon his adversaries. All creatures conspire to revenge the injuries of God. If the Egyptians look upward, there they have thunder, lightning, hail, tempests: one while no light at all: another while such fearful flashes, as had more terror than darkness. If they look under them, there they see their waters changed into blood, their earth swarming with frogs and grasshoppers: if about them, one while the flies fill their eyes and ears; another while they see their fruits destroyed, their cattle dying, their children dead. If, lastly, they look upon themselves, they see themselves loathsome with lice, painful and deformed with scabs, biles, and blotches.

First, God begins his judgments with waters. As the river of Nilus was to Egypt, instead of heaven, to moisten and fatten the earth; so their confidence was more in it than in heaven. Men are sure to be punished most, and soonest, in that which they make a co-rival with God. They had before defiled the river with the blood of innocents; and now it appears to them in his own colour. The waters will no longer keep their counsel. Never any man delighted in blood, which had not enough of it ere his end: they shed but some few streams, and now behold whole rivers of blood. Neither was this more a monument of their slaughter past, than an image of their future destruction. They were afterwards overwhelmed in the Red Sea: and now, beforehand, they see the rivers red with blood. How dependent and servile is the life of man, that cannot either want one element, or endure it corrupted! It is hard to say, whether there were more horror or annoyance in this plague. They complain of thirst, and yet doubt whether they should die or quench it with blood. Their fish (the chief part of their sustenance) dies with the infection, and infecteth more by being dead. The stench of both is ready to poison the inhabitants; yet Pharaoh's curiosity carries him away quite from the sense of the judgment. He had rather send for his magicians to work feats, than to humble himself under God for the removal of this plague; and God plagues his curiosity with deceit: those whom he trusts shall undo him with prevailing. The glory of a second miracle shall be obscured by a false imitation, for a greater glory to God in the sequel.

The rod is lift up again. Behold, that Nilus, which they had before adored, was never so beneficial as it is now troublesome: yielding them not only a dead, but a living annoyance: it never did so store them with fish as it now plagues them with frogs. Whatsoever any man makes his god, besides the true one, shall be once his tormentor. Those loathsome creatures leave their own element to punish them which rebelliously detained Israel from their own. No bed, no table can be free from them: their dainty ladies cannot keep them out of their bosoms; neither can the Egyptians sooner open their mouths than they are ready to creep into their throats: as if they would tell them, that they came on purpose to revenge the wrongs of their Maker. Yet even this wonder also is

Satan allowed to imitate. Who can marvel to see the best virtues counterfeited by wicked men, when he sees the devil emulating the miraculous power of God? The feats that Satan plays may harden, but cannot benefit. He that hath leave to bring frogs, hath neither leave nor power to take them away, nor to take away the stench from them. To bring them, was but to add to the judgment; to remove them, was an act of mercy. God doth commonly use Satan in executing of judgment, never in the works of mercy to men.

Yet even by thus much is Pharaoh hardened, and the sorcerers grown insolent. When the devil and his agents are in the height of their pride, God shames them in a trifle. The rod is lift up. The very dust receives life. Lice abound every where, and make no difference betwixt beggars and princes. Though Pharaoh and his courtiers abhorred to see themselves lousy, yet they hoped this miracle would be more easily imitable: but now the greater possibility, the greater foil. How are the great wonder-mongers of Egypt abashed, that they can neither make lice of their own, nor deliver themselves from the lice that are made! Those that could make serpents and frogs, could not either make or kill lice; to show them that those frogs and serpents were not their own workmanship. Now Pharaoh must needs see how impotent a devil he served, that could not make that vermin which every day arises voluntarily out of corruption. Jannes and Jambres cannot now make those lice (so much as by delusion) which, at another time, they cannot choose but produce unknowing, and which now they cannot avoid. That spirit which is powerful to execute the greatest things when he is bidden, is unable to do the least when he is restrained. Now these co-rivals of Moses can say, "This is the finger of God." Ye foolish enchanters, was God's finger in the lice, not in the frogs, not in the blood, not in the serpent? And why was it rather in the less than in the greater? because ye did imitate the other, not these; as if the same finger of God had not been before in your imitation, which was now in your restraint; as if ye could have failed in these, if ye had not been only permitted the other. While wicked minds have their full scope, they never look up above themselves; but when once God crosses them in their proceedings, their want of success teaches them to give God his own. All these plagues, perhaps, had more horror than pain in them. The frogs creep upon their clothes, the lice upon their skins: but those stinging hornets which succeed them, shall wound and kill. The water was annoyed with the first plague, the earth with the second and third; this fourth fills the air, and, besides corruption, brings smart. And that they may see this winged army comes from an angry God (not either from nature or chance), even the very flies shall make a difference betwixt Egypt and Goshen. He which gave them their being, sets them their stint. They cannot more sting an Israelite than favour an Egyptian. The very wings of flies are directed by a providence, and do acknowledge their limits. Now Pharaoh finds how impossible it is for him to stand out with God, since all his power cannot rescue him from lice and flies.

And now his heart begins to thaw a little: "Go, do sacrifice to your God in this land;" or, (since that will not be accepted) "go into the wilderness, but not far." But how soon it knits again! Good thoughts make but a thoroughfare of carnal hearts, they can never settle there;

yea, his very misgiving hardens him the more, that now neither the murrain of his cattle, nor the botches of his servants can stir him a whit. He saw his cattle struck dead with a sudden contagion; he saw his sorcerers (after their contestation with God's messengers) struck with a scab in their very faces, and yet his heart is not struck. Who would think it possible, that any soul could be secure in the midst of such variety and frequence of judgments? These very plagues have not more wonder in them, than their success hath. To what a height of obduration will sin lead a man, and, of all sins, incredulity! Amidst all these storms Pharaoh sleepeth, till the voice of God's mighty thunders, and hail mixed with fire, roused him up a little.

Now, as betwixt sleeping and waking, he starts up, and says, "God is righteous, I am wicked; Moses, pray for us;" and presently lays down his head again. God hath no sooner done thundering, than he hath done fearing. All this while you never find him careful to prevent any one evil, but desirous still to shift it off, when he feels it; never holds constant to any good motion; never prays for himself, but carelessly wills Moses and Aaron to pray for him; never yields God his whole demand, but higgleth and dodgeth, like some hard chapmen, that would get a release with the cheapest. First, They shall not go; then, Go, and sacrifice, but in Egypt; next, Go, sacrifice in the wilderness, but not far off; after, Go, ye that are men; then, Go, you and your children only; at last, Go, all save your sheep and cattle. Wheresoever mere nature is, she is still improvident of future good, sensible of present evil, inconstant in good purposes, unable through unacquaintance, and unwilling to speak for herself; niggardly in her grants and uncheerful. The plague of the grasshoppers startled him a little, and the more through the importunity of his servants; for when he considered the fish destroyed with the first blow, the cattle with the fifth, the corn with the seventh, the fruit and leaves with this eighth, and nothing now left him but a bare fruitless earth to live upon, (and that covered over with locusts) necessity drove him to relent for an advantage: "Forgive me this once; take from me this death only."

But as constrained repentance is ever short and unsound, the west-wind, together with the grasshoppers, blows away his remorse; and now is he ready for another judgment. As the grasshoppers took away the sight of the earth from him, so now a gross darkness takes away the sight of heaven too. Other darknesses were but privative, this was real and sensible. The Egyptians thought this night long, (how could they choose, when it was six in one?) and so much the more, for that no man could rise to talk with other, but was necessarily confined to his own thoughts. One thinks the fault in his own eyes, which he rubs oftentimes in vain. Others think, that the sun is lost out of the firmament, and is now withdrawn for ever; others, that all things are returning to their first confusion: all think themselves miserable, past remedy, and wish (whatsoever had befallen them) that they might have had but light enough to see themselves die.

Now Pharaoh proves like to some beasts that grow mad with baiting. Grace often resisted turns to desperateness. "Get thee from me, look thou see my face no more; whensoever thou comest in my sight, thou shalt die." As if Moses could not plague him as well in absence; as if he that could not take away the lice, flies, frogs, grasshoppers, could, at his pleasure, take away the life of Moses that procured them. What is this but to run upon the judgments, and run away from the remedies? Evermore, when God's messengers are abandoned, destruction is near. Moses will see him no more, till he see him dead upon the sands; but God will now visit him more than ever. The fearfullest plagues God still reserves for the upshot: all the former do but make way for the last. Pharaoh may exclude Moses and Aaron, but God's angel he cannot exclude. Insensible messengers are used, when the visible are debarred.

Now God begins to call for the blood they owed him: in one night every house hath a carcass in it, and, which is more grievous, of their first-born, and, which is yet more fearful, in an instant. No man could comfort another; every man was too full of his own sorrow, helping rather to make the noise of the lamentation more doleful and astonishing. How soon hath God changed the note of this tyrannical people! Egypt was never so stubborn in denying passage to Israel, as now importunate to entreat it. Pharaoh did not more force them to stay before, than now to depart: whom lately they would not permit, now they hire to go. Their rich jewels of silver and gold were not too dear for them, whom they hated; how much rather had they to send them away wealthy, than to have them stay to be their executors! Their love to themselves obtained of them the enriching of their enemies; and now they are glad to pay them well for their old work, and their present journey. God's people had staid like slaves; they go away like conquerors, with the spoil of those that hated them, armed for security, and wealthy for maintenance.

Old Jacob's seventy souls which he brought down into Egypt, in spite of their bondage and bloodshed, go forth six hundred thousand men, besides children. The world is well mended with Israel, since he went with his staff and his scrip over Jordan. Tyranny is too weak, where God bids "Increase and multiply." I know not where else the good herb overgrows the weeds; the church outstrips the world. I fear, if they had lived in ease and delicacy, they had not been so strong, so numerous. Never any true Israelite lost by his affliction. Not only for the action, but the time, Pharaoh's choice meets with God's. That very night, when the hundred and thirty years were expired, Israel is gone: Pharaoh neither can, nor can will to keep them any longer; yet in this, not fulfilling God's will, but his own. How sweetly doth God dispose of all second causes, that, while they do their own will, they do his!

The Israelites are equally glad of this haste. Who would not be ready to go, yea to fly out of bondage? They have what they wished; it was no staying for a second invitation. The loss of an opportunity is many times unrecoverable. The love of their liberty made the burden of their dough light. Who knew whether the variable mind of Pharaoh might return to a denial, and, after all his stubbornness, repent of his obedience? It is foolish to hazard, where there is certainty of good offers, and uncertainty of continuance. They go therefore; and the same God that fetched them out, is both their guide and protector. How carefully doth he choose their way! not the nearer, but the safer. He would not have his people so suddenly change from bondage to war.

It is the wondrous mercy of God, that he hath respect, as to his own glory, so to our infirmities. He intends them wars hereafter, but after some longer breathing and more preparation; his goodness so orders all, that evils are not ready for us, till we be ready for them. And as he chooses, so he guides their way. That they might not err in that sandy and untracted wilderness, himself goes before them: who could but follow cheerfully, when he sees God lead him! He that led the wise men by a star, leads Israel by a cloud. That was a higher object, therefore he gives them a higher and more heavenly conduct: this was more earthly, therefore he contents himself with a lower representation of his presence: a pillar of cloud and fire: a pillar for firmness, of cloud and fire for visibility and use. The greater light extinguishes the less; therefore in the day he shows them not fire, but a cloud. In the night nothing is seen without light; therefore he shows them not the cloud but fire. The cloud shelters them from heat by day; the fire, digests the rawness of the night. The same God is both a cloud and a fire to his children, ever putting himself into those forms of gracious respects that may best fit their necessities.

As good motions are long ere they can enter into hard hearts, so they seldom continue long. No sooner were the backs of Israel turned to depart, than Pharaoh's heart and face is turned after them, to fetch them back again. It vexes him to see so great a command, so much wealth cast away in one night, which now he resolves to redeem, though with more plagues. The same ambition and covetousness, that made him wear out so many judgments, will not leave him, till it have wrought out his full destruction. All God's vengeances have their end, the final perdition of his enemies, which they cannot rest till they have attained. Pharaoh therefore, and his Egyptians, will needs go fetch their bane. They well knew that Israel was fitter to serve than to fight; weary with their servitude, not trained up to war, not furnished with provision for a field: themselves, captains and soldiers by profession, furnished with horses and chariots of war. They gave themselves therefore the victory beforehand, and Israel either for spoil or bondage. Yea, the weak Israelites gave up themselves for dead, and are already talking of their graves. They see the sea before them, behind them the Egyptians: they know not which is most merciless, and are stricken with the fear of both. O God, how couldst thou forbear so distrustful a people! They had seen all thy wonders in Egypt, and in their Goshen; they saw even now thy pillar before them, and yet they did more fear Egypt than believe thee. Thy patience is no less miracle than thy deliverance. But instead of removing from them, the cloudy pillar removes behind them, and stands betwixt the Israelites and Egyptians; as if God would have said, they shall first overcome me, O Israel, ere they touch thee. Wonder did now justly strive with fear in the Israelites; when they saw the cloud remove behind them, and the sea remove before them. They were not used to such bulwarks. God stood behind them in the cloud, the sea reared them up walls on both sides of them. That, which they feared would be their destruction, protected them. How easily can God make the cruellest of his creatures both our friends and patrons!

Yet here was faith mixed with unbelief. He was a bold Israelite that set the first foot into the channel of the sea: and every step that they set, in that moist way, was a new exercise of their faith. Pharaoh sees all this, and wonders; yet hath not the wit or grace to think, (though the pillar tell him so much) that God made a difference betwixt him and Israel. He is offended with the sea, for giving way to his enemies, and yet sees not why he may not trust it as well as they. He might well have thought, that he which gave light in Goshen, when there was darkness in Egypt, could as well distinguish in the sea; but he cannot now either consider, or fear: it is his time to perish. God makes him fair way, and lets him run smoothly on, till he come to the midst of the sea; not one wave may rise up against him, to wet so much as the hoof of his horse. Extraordinary favours to wicked men are the forerunners of their ruin.

Now, when God sees the Egyptians too far to return, he finds time to strike them with their last terror. They know not why, but they would return too late. Those chariots, in which they trusted, now fail them; as having done service enough, to carry them into perdition. God pursues them, and they cannot flee from him. Wicked men make equal haste, both to sin and from judgment: but they shall one day find, that it is not more easy to run into sin, than impossible to run away from judgment: the sea will show them that it regards the rod of Moses, not the sceptre of Pharaoh; and now (as glad to have got the enemies of God at such an advantage) shuts her mouth upon them, and swallows them up in her waves; and, after she hath made sport with them awhile, casts them upon her sand, for a spectacle of triumph to their adversaries.

What a sight was this to the Israelites, when they were now safe on the shore, to see their enemies come floating after them upon the billows, and to find among the carcasses upon the sands, their known oppressors, which now they can tread upon with exultation! They did not cry more loud before than now they sing. Not their faith, but their sense, teaches them now to magnify that God, after their deliverance, whom they hardly trusted for their deliverance.

BOOK V.

CONTEMPLATION I.—THE WATERS OF MARAH.

ISRAEL was not more loath to come to the Red Sea than to part from it. How soon can God turn the horror of any evil into pleasure! One shore resounded with shrieks of fear; the other with timbrels, and dances, and songs of deliverance. Every main affliction is our Red Sea, which, while it threats to swallow, preserves us. At last our songs shall be louder than our cries. The Israelitish dames, when they saw their danger, thought they might have left their timbrels behind them. How unprofitable a burden seemed those instruments of music! Yet now they live to renew that forgotten minstrelsy and dancing, which their bondage had so long discontinued! and well might those feet dance upon the shore, which had walked through the sea. The land of Goshen was not so bountiful to them as these waters: that afforded them a servile life; this gave them at once freedom, victory, riches, bestowing upon them the remainder of that wealth which the Egyptians had but lent. It was a pleasure to see the floating carcasses of their adversaries; and every day offers them new booties: it is no marvel then if their hearts were tied to these banks. If we find but a little pleasure in our life, we are ready to doat upon it. Every small contentment glues our affections to that we like; and if here our imperfect delights hold us so fast that we would not be loosed, how forcible shall those infinite joys be above, when our souls are once possessed of them.

Yet if the place had pleased them more, it is no marvel they were willing to follow Moses; that they durst follow him in the wilderness, whom they followed through the sea. It is a great confirmation to any people, when they have seen the hand of God with their guide. O Saviour, which hast undertaken to carry me from the spiritual Egypt to the land of promise, how faithful, how powerful have I found thee! how fearlessly should I trust thee! how cheerfully should I follow thee through contempt, poverty, death itself. "Master, if it be thou, bid us come unto thee."

Immediately before, they had complained of too much water; now they go three days without. Thus God meant to punish their infidelity, with the defect of that whose abundance made them to distrust. Before they saw all water, no land; now, all dry and dusty land, and no water. Extremities are the best trials of men; as in bodies, those that can bear sudden changes of heats and cold without complaint, are the strongest. So much as an evil touches upon the mean, so much help it yields towards patience. Every degree of sorrow is a preparation of the next: but when we pass to extremes without the mean, we want the benefit of recollection, and must trust to our present strength. To come from all things to nothing, is not a descent but a downfall; and it is a rare strength and constancy, not to be maimed at least. These headlong evils, as they are the sorest, so they must be most provided for; as, on the contrary, a sudden advancement, from a low condition to the height of honour, is most hard to manage. No man can marvel how that tyrant blinded his captives, when he hears that he brought them immediately out of a dark dungeon into rooms that were made bright and glorious. We are not worthy to know for what we are reserved. No evil can amaze us if we can overcome sudden extremities.

The long deferring of a good, though tedious, yet makes it the better when it comes. Well did the Israelites hope, that the waters, which were so long in finding, would be precious when they were found: yet behold they are crossed not only in their desires, but in their hopes; for, after three days' travel, the first fountains they find are bitter waters. If these wells had not run pure gall, they could not have so much complained. Long thirst will make bitter waters sweet. Yet such were these springs that the Israelites did not so much like their moisture as abhor their relish. I see the first handsel that God gives them, in their voyage to the land of promise, thirst and bitterness. Satan gives us pleasant entrances into his ways, and reserves the bitterness for the end. God inures us to our worst at first, and sweetens our conclusion with pleasure.

The same God that would not lead Israel through the Philistines' land, lest they should shrink at the sight of war, now leads them through the wilderness, and fears not to try their patience with bitter potions. If he had not loved them, the Egyptian furnace, or sword, had prevented their thirst, or the sea whereof their enemies drunk dead; and yet see how he diets them! Never any have had so bitter draughts upon earth, as those he loves best. The palate is an ill judge of the favours of God. O my Saviour, thou didst drink a more bitter cup from the hands of thy Father, than that which thou refusedst of the Jews, or than that which I can drink from thee!

Before, they could not drink if they would; now, they might and would not. God can give us blessings with such a tang, that the fruition shall not much differ from the want. So many a one hath riches, not grace to use them; many have children, but such as they prefer barrenness. They had said before, Oh that we had any water! Now, Oh that we had good water! It is good so to desire blessings from God, that we may be the better for enjoying them; so to crave water, that it may not be sauced with bitterness.

Now, these fond Israelites, instead of praying, murmur; instead of praying to God, murmur against Moses. "What hath the righteous done?" He made not either the wilderness dry, or the waters bitter: yea, if his conduct were the matter, what one foot went he before them without God? The pillar led them, and not he; yet Moses is murmured at. It is the hard condition of authority, that when the multitude fare well, they applaud themselves; when ill, they repine against their governors. Who can hope to be free, if Moses escape not? Never any prince so merited of a people. He thrust himself upon the pikes of Pharaoh's tyranny—he brought them from a bondage worse than death—his rod divided the sea, and shared life to them, death to their pursuers. Who would not have thought these men so obliged to Moses, that no death could have opened their mouths, or raised their hands against him? Yet now, the first occasion of want makes them rebel. No benefit can stop the mouth of impatience. If our turn be not served for the present, former favours are either forgotten or contemned. No marvel if we deal so with men, when God receives this measure from us. One year of famine, one summer of pestilence, one moon of unseasonable weather, makes us overlook all the blessings of God; and more to mutiny at the sense of our evil, than to praise him for our varieties of good: whereas, favours well bestowed leave us both mindful and confident, and will not suffer us either to forget or distrust. O God, I have made an ill use of thy mercies, if I have not learnt to be content with thy corrections.

Moses was in the same want of water with them, in the same distaste of bitterness; and yet they say to Moses, What shall we drink? If they had seen him furnished with full vessels of sweet water, and themselves put over to this unsavoury liquor, envy might have given some colour to this mutiny; but now their leader's common misery might have freed him from their murmurs. They held it one piece of the late Egyptian tyranny, that a task was required of them (which the imposers knew they could not perform) to make brick when they have no straw; yet they say to Moses, What shall we drink? Themselves are grown exactors, and are ready to menace more than stripes, if they have not their ends without means. Moses took not upon him their provision, but their deliverance; and yet, as if he had been the common victualler of the camp, they ask, What shall we drink? When want meets with impatient minds, it transports them to fury; every thing disquiets, and nothing satisfies them.

What course doth Moses now take? That which they should have done, and did not. They cried not more fervently to him, than he to God. If he were their leader, God was his. That which they unjustly required of him, he justly requires of God that could do it. He knew whence to look for redress of all complaints: this was not his charge, but his Maker's, which was able to maintain his own act. I see and acknowledge the harbour that we must put into in all our ill weather. It is to thee, O God, that we must pour out our hearts, who only canst make our bitter waters sweet.

Might not that rod, which took away the liquid nature from the waters, and made them solid, have also taken away the bitter quality from these waters, and made them sweet, since to flow is natural unto the water, to be bitter is but accidental? Moses durst not employ his rod without a precept; he knew the power came from the commandment. We may not presume on likelihoods, but depend upon warrants: therefore Moses doth not lift up his rod to the waters, but his hand and voice to God.

The hand of faith never knocked at heaven in vain. No sooner hath Moses showed his grievance, than God shows him the remedy; yet an unlikely one, that it might be miraculous. He that made the waters, could have given them any savour. How easy is it for him that made the matter to alter the quality! It is not more hard to take away than to give. Who doubts but the same hand that created them, might have immediately changed them? Yet that almighty power will do it by means. A piece of wood must sweeten the waters. What relation hath wood to water! or that which hath no savour, to the redress of bitterness? Yet here is no more possibility of failing, than proportion to the success. All things are subject to the command of their Maker. He that made all of nothing, can make every thing of any thing. There is so much power in every creature as he will please to give. It is the praise of Omnipotency to work by improbabilities; Elisha with salt, Moses with wood, shall sweeten the bitter waters. Let no man despise the means when he knows the author.

God taught his people by actions, as well as words. This entrance showed them their whole journey, wherein they should taste of much bitterness; but at last, through the mercy of God, sweetened with comfort. Or did it not represent themselves rather in the journey, in the fountains of whose hearts were the bitter waters of manifold corruptions? yet their unsavoury souls are sweetened by the graces of his Spirit. O blessed Saviour, the wood of thy cross, that is, the application of thy sufferings, is enough to sweeten a whole sea of bitterness! I care not how unpleasant a potion I find in this wilderness, if the power and benefit of thy precious death may season it to my soul.

CONTEMPLATION II.—THE QUAILS AND MANNA.

THE thirst of Israel is well quenched; for, besides the change of the waters of Marah, their station is changed to Elim, where were twelve fountains for their twelve tribes. And now they complain as much of hunger.

Contentation is a rare blessing; because it arises either from a fruition of all comforts, or a not desiring of some which we have not. Now, we are never so bare as not to have some benefits; never so full, as not to want something, yea, as not to be full of wants. God hath much ado with us. Either we lack health, or quietness, or children, or wealth, or company, or ourselves in all these. It is a wonder these men found not fault with the want of sauce to their quails, or with their old clothes, or their solitary way. Nature is moderate in her desires; but conceit is insatiable. Yet who can deny hunger to be a sore vexation? Before, they were forbidden sour bread; but now, what leaven is so sour as want? When means hold out, it is easy to be content. While their dough, and other cakes lasted, while they were gathering of the dates of Elim, we hear no news of them. Who cannot pray for his daily bread when he hath it in his cupboard? But when our own provision fails us, then not to distrust the provision of God, is a noble trial of faith. They should have said, He that stopt the mouth of the sea, that it could not devour us, can as easily stop the mouth of our stomachs. It was no easier matter to kill the first-born of Egypt, by his immediate hand, than to preserve us. He that commanded the sea to stand still and guard us, can as easily command the earth to nourish us. He that made the rod a serpent, can as well make these stones bread. He that brought armies of frogs and caterpillars to Egypt, can as well bring whole drifts of birds and beasts to the desert. He that sweetened the waters with wood, can as well refresh our bodies with the fruits of the earth. Why do we not wait on him, whom we have found so powerful? Now they set the mercy and love of God upon a wrong last, while they measure it only by their present sense. Nature is jocund and cheerful, while it prospereth: let God withdraw his hand, no sight, no trust. Those can praise him with timbrels, for a present favour, that cannot depend upon him in the want of means for a future. We all are never weary of receiving, soon weary of attending.

The other mutiny was of some few malcontents, perhaps those strangers, which sought their own protection under the wing of Israel; this, of the whole troop. Not that none were free; Caleb, Joshua, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, were not yet tainted. Usually God measures the state of any church or country by the most; the greater part carries both the name and censure. Sins are so much the greater as they are more universal: so far is evil from being extenuated by the multitude of the guilty, that nothing can more aggravate it. With men, commonness may plead for favour; with God, it pleads for judgment. Many hands draw the cable with more violence than few. The leprosy of the whole body is more loathsome than that of a part.

But what do these mutineers say? Oh that we had died by the hand of the Lord! And whose hand was this, O ye fond Israelites, if you must perish by famine! God carried you forth; God restrained his creatures from you; and, while ye are ready to die, thus, ye say, Oh that we had died by the hand of the Lord!

It is the folly of men, that in immediate judgments they can see God's hand; not in those whose second causes are sensible: whereas God holds himself equally interested in all, challenging, that there is no evil in the city but from him. It is but one hand, and many instruments, that God strikes us with. The water may not lose the name, though it comes by channels and pipes from the spring. It is our faithlessness, that in visible means, we see not him that is invisible.

And when would they have wished to die? When they sat by the flesh-pots of Egypt? Alas, what good would their flesh-pots have done them in their death! If they might sustain their life, yet what could they avail them in dying? For, if they were unpleasant, what comfort was it to see them? if pleasant, what comfort to part from them? Our greatest pleasures are but pains in their loss. Every mind affects that which is like itself. Carnal minds are for the flesh-pots of Egypt, though bought with servitude: spiritual are for the presence of God, though redeemed with famine; and would rather die in God's presence, than live without him, in the sight of delicate or full dishes.

They loved their lives well enough. I heard how they shrieked, when they were in danger of the Egyptians; yet now they say, Oh that we had died! Not, Oh that we might live by the flesh-pots; but, Oh that we had died! Although life be naturally sweet, yet a little discontentment makes us weary. It is a base cowardliness, so soon as ever we are called from the garrison to the field, to think of running away. Then is our fortitude worthy of praise, when we can endure to be miserable.

But what, can no flesh-pots serve but those of Egypt? I am deceived, if that land afforded them any flesh-pots save their own. Their landlords of Egypt held it abomination to eat of their dishes, or to kill that which they did eat. In those times then they did eat of their own; and why not now? They had droves of cattle in the wilderness; why did they not take of them? Surely, if they would have been as good husbands of their cattle as they were of their dough, they might have had enough to eat, without need of murmuring: for if their back burdens of dough lasted for a month, their herds might have served them many years. All grudging is odious, but most when our hands are full. To whine in the midst of abundance, is a shameful unthankfulness.

When a man would have looked that the anger of God should have appeared in fire, now, behold, his glory appears in a cloud. Oh the exceeding long-suffering of God, that hears their murmurings; and, as if he had been bound to content them, instead of punishing, pleases them! as a kind mother would deal with a crabbed child, who rather stills him with the breast, than calls for the rod. One would have thought, that the sight of the cloud of God should have dispelled the cloud of their distrust; and this glory of God should have made them ashamed of themselves, and afraid of him: yet I do not hear them once say, What mighty and gracious God have we distrusted! Nothing will content an impotent mind but fruition. When a heart is hardened with any passion, it will endure much ere it will yield to relent.

Their eyes saw the cloud; their ears heard the promise; the performance is speedy and answerable. Needs must they be convinced, when they saw God as glorious in his work as in his presence; when they saw his word justified by his act. God tells them aforehand what he will do, that their expectation might stay their hearts. He doth that which he foretold, that they might learn to trust him ere he performed. They desired meat, and receive quails; they desired bread, and have manna. If they had had of the coarsest flesh, and of the basest pulse, hunger would have made it dainty: but now God will pamper their famine; and gives them meat of kings, and bread of angels. What a world of quails were but sufficient to serve six hundred thousand persons! They were all strong, all hungry; neither could they be satisfied with single fowls. What a table hath God prepared in the desert, for abundance, for delicacy! Never prince was so served in his greatest pomp, as these rebellious Israelites in the wilderness. God loves to over-deserve of men, and to exceed, not only their sins, but their very desires, in mercy. How good shall we find him to those that please him, since he is so gracious to offenders! If the most graceless Israelites be fed with quails and manna, O what goodness is that he hath laid up for them that love him! As, on the contrary, if the righteous scarce be saved, where will the sinners appear! O God, thou canst, thou wilt make this difference. Howsoever, with us men, the most crabbed and stubborn oftentimes fare the best; the righteous Judge of the world frames his remuneration as he finds us: and if his mercy sometimes provoke the worst to repentance by his temporal favours, yet he ever reserves so much greater reward for the righteous, as eternity is beyond time, and heaven above earth.

It was not of any natural instinct, but from the overruling power of their Creator, that these quails came to the desert. Needs must they come whom God brings. His hand is in all the motions of his meanest creatures. Not only we, but they move in him. As not many quails, so not one sparrow falls without him. How much more are the actions of his best creature, man, directed by his providence! How ashamed might these Israelites have been, to see these creatures so obedient to their Creator, as to come and offer themselves to their slaughter; while they went so repiningly to his service and their own preferment! Who can distrust the provision of the great Housekeeper of the world, when he sees how he can furnish his tables at pleasure? Is he grown now careless, or we faithless rather? Why do we not repose upon his mercy? Rather than we shall want, when we trust him, he will fetch quails from all the coasts of heaven to our board. O Lord, thy hand is not shortened to give; let not ours be shortened, or shut in receiving.

Eliah's servitors, the ravens, brought him his full service of bread and flesh at once, each morning and evening. But these Israelites have their flesh at even, and their bread in the morning. Good reason there should be a difference. Eliah's table was upon God's direct appointment; the Israelites' upon their mutiny. Although God will relieve them with provision, yet he will punish their impatience with delay; so shall they know themselves his people, that they shall find they were murmurers. Not only in the matter, but in the order, God answers their grudging; first, they complain of the want of flesh-pots, then of bread. In the first place therefore they have flesh, bread after. When they have flesh, yet they must stay a time ere they can have a full meal, unless they would eat their meat breadless, and their bread dry. God will be waited on, and will give the consummation of his blessings at his leisure. In the evening of our life, we have the first pledges of his favour: but in the morning of our resurrection, must we look for our perfect satiety of the true manna, the bread of life.

Now the Israelites sped well with their quails; they did eat and digest, and prosper: not long after, they have quails with a vengeance; the meat was pleasant, but the sauce was fearful. They let down the quails at their mouth, but they came out at their nostrils. How much better had it been to have died of hunger, through the chastisement of God, than of the plague of God, with the flesh betwixt their teeth! Behold, they perish of the same disease then, whereof they now recover. The same sin repeated is death, whose first act found remission. Relapses are desperate, where the sickness itself is not. With us men, once goes away with a warning, the second is but whipping, the third is death. It is a mortal thing to abuse the lenity of God. We should be presumptuously mad, to hope that God will stand us for a sinning-stock, to provoke him how we will. It is more mercy than he owes us, if he forbear us once; it is his justice to plague us the second time. We may thank ourselves if we will not be warned.

Their meat was strange, but nothing so much as their bread. To find quails in a wilderness was unusual; but for bread to come down from heaven was yet more. They had seen quails before, though not in such number; manna was never seen till now. From this day, till their settling in Canaan, God wrought a perpetual miracle in this food. A miracle in this place: other bread rises up from below, this fell down from above; neither did it ever rain bread till now; yet so did this heavenly shower fall, that it is confined to the camp of Israel. A miracle in the quantity; that every morning should fall enough to fill so many hundred thousand mouths and maws. A miracle in the composition; that it is sweet like honey-cakes, round like corianders, transparent as dew. A miracle in the quality; that it melted by one heat, by another hardened. A miracle in the difference of the fall; that (as if it knew times, and would teach them as well as feed them) it fell double in the even of the Sabbath, and on the Sabbath fell not. A miracle in the putrefaction and preservation; that it was full of worms, when it was kept beyond the due hour for distrust; full of sweetness when it was kept a day longer for religion; yea, many ages, in the ark, for a monument of the power and mercy of the Giver. A miracle in the continuance and ceasing; that this shower of bread followed their camp in all their removals, till they came to taste of the bread of Canaan; and then withdrew itself, as if it should have said, Ye need no miracles, now ye have means.

They had the types, we have the substance. In this wilderness of the world, the true manna is rained upon the tents of our hearts. He that sent the manna, was the manna which he sent. He hath said, "I am the manna that came down from heaven." Behold, their whole meals were sacramental. Every morsel they did eat was spiritual. We eat still of their manna: still he comes down from heaven. He hath substance enough for worlds of souls, yet only is to be found in the lists of the true church; he hath more sweetness, than the honey, and the honeycomb. Happy are we, if we can find him so sweet as he is.

The same hand that rained manna upon their tents, could have rained it into their mouths, or laps. God loves we should take pains for our spiritual food. Little would it have availed them, that the manna lay about their tents, if they had not gone forth and gathered it, beaten it, baked it. Let salvation be never so plentiful, if we bring it not home, and make it ours by faith, we are no whit the better. If the work done, and means used, had been enough to give life, no Israelite had died. Their bellies were full of that bread, whereof one crumb gives life; yet they died many of them in displeasure. As in natural, so in spiritual things, we may not trust to means. The carcass of the sacrament cannot give life, but the soul of it, which is the thing represented. I see each man gather, and take his just measure out of the common heap. We must be industrious, and helpful each to other; but, when we have done, Christ is not partial. If our sanctification differ, yet our justification is equal in all.

He that gave a homer to each, could have given an ephah. As easily could he have rained down enough for a month, or a year at once, as for a day. God delights to have us live in a continual dependence upon his providence, and each day renew the acts of our faith and thankfulness. But what a covetous Israelite was that, which, in a foolish distrust, would be sparing the charges of God, and reserving that for morning, which he should have spent upon his supper! He shall know, that even the bread that came down from heaven can corrupt. The manna was from above, the worms and stink from his diffidence. Nothing is so sovereign, which, being perverted, may not annoy instead of benefiting us.

Yet I see some difference between the true and typical manna; God never meant that the shadow and the body should agree in all things. The outward manna reserved was poison; the spiritual manna is to us, as it was to the ark, not good, unless it be kept perpetually. If we keep it, it shall keep us from putrefaction. The outward manna fell not at all on the Sabbath. The spiritual manna, though it balks no day, yet it falls double on God's day; and if we gather it not then, we famish. In that true Sabbath of our glorious rest, we shall for ever feed on that manna which we have gathered in this, even of our life.

CONTEMPLATION III.—THE ROCK OF REPHIDIM.

Before, Israel thirsted and was satisfied; after that, they hungered and were filled; now they thirst again. They have bread and meat, but want drink. It is a marvel if God do not evermore hold us short of something, because he would keep us still in exercise. We should forget at whose cost we live, if we wanted nothing. Still God observes a vicissitude of evil and good; and the same evils that we have passed return upon us in their courses. Crosses are not of the nature of those diseases which they say a man can have but once. Their first leisure doth but make way for their re-entry. None but our last enemy comes once for all: and I know not if that; for even in living, we die daily. So must we take our leaves of all afflictions, that we reserve a lodging for them and expect their return.

All Israel murmured when they wanted bread, meat, water; and yet all Israel departed from the wilderness of Sin to Rephidim, at God's command. The very worst men will obey God in something; none but the good, in all. He is rarely desperate, that makes a universal opposition to God. It is an unsound praise that is given a man for one good action. It may be safely said of the very devils themselves, that they do something well: they know and believe, and tremble. If we follow God and murmur, it is all one as if we had staid behind.

Those distrust his providence in their necessity, that are ready to follow his guidance in their welfare. It is a harder matter to endure an extreme want, than to obey a hard commandment. Sufferings are greater trials than actions. How many have we seen jeopard their lives, with cheerful resolution, which cannot endure in cold blood to lose a limb with patience? Because God will have his thoroughly tried, he puts them to both; and if we cannot endure both to follow him from Sin and to thirst in Rephidim, we are not sound Israelites.

God led them on purpose to this dry Rephidim. He could as well have conducted them to another Elim, to convenient waterings. Or he, that gives the waters of all their channels, could as well have derived them to meet Israel: but God doth purposely carry them to thirst. It is not for necessity that we fare ill, but out of choice. It were all one with God to give us health, as sickness; abundance, as poverty. The treasury of his riches hath more store than his creature can be capable of. We should not complain, if it were not good for us to want.

This should have been a contentment able to quench any thirst; "God hath led us hither." If Moses, out of ignorance, had misguided us, or we by chance had fallen upon these dry deserts, though this were no remedy of our grief, yet it might be some ground of our complaint. But now the counsel of so wise and merciful a God hath drawn into this want; and shall not he as easily find the way out? "It is the Lord, let him do what he will." There can be no more forcible motive to patience, than the acknowledgment of a divine hand that strikes us. It is fearful to be in the hand of an adversary; but who would not be confident of a father? Yet, in our frail humanity, choler may transport a man from the remembrance of nature; but when we feel ourselves under the discipline of a wise God (that can temper our afflictions to our strength, to our benefit), who would not rather murmur at himself that he should swerve towards impatience? Yet these sturdy Israelites wilfully murmur, and will not have their thirst quenched with faith, but with water; "Give us water."

I looked to hear when they would have entreated Moses to pray for them: but, instead of entreating, they contend; and, instead of prayers, I find commands: "Give us water." If they had gone to God without Moses, I should have praised their faith: but now they go to Moses without God, I hate their stubborn faithlessness. To seek to the second means, with neglect of the first, is the fruit of a false faith.

The answer of Moses is, like himself, mild and sweet. Why contend ye with me? "Why tempt ye the Lord?" in the first expostulation condemning them of injustice; since not he, but the Lord, hath afflicted them: in the second, of presumption; that since it was God that tempted them by want, they should tempt him by murmuring. In the one he would have them see their wrong; in the other, their danger. As the act came not from him, but from God, so he puts it off to God from himself. "Why tempt ye the Lord?" The opposition which is made to the instruments of God, redounds ever to his person. He holds himself smitten through the sides of his ministers. So hath God incorporated these respects, that our subtilty cannot divide them.

But what temptation is this? "Is the Lord among us, or no?" Infidelity is crafty and yet foolish; crafty in her insinuations, foolish in her conceits. They imply, "If we were sure the Lord were with us, we would not distrust." They conceive doubts of his presence, after such confirmations. What could God do more to make them know him present, unless every moment should have renewed miracles? The plagues of Egypt, and the division of the sea were so famous, that the very inns of Jericho rang of them. Their waters were lately sweetened; the quails were yet in their teeth; the manna was yet in their eye; yea, they saw God in the pillar of the cloud, and yet they say, "Is the Lord amongst us?" No argument is enough to an incredulous heart; not reason, sense, nor experience. How much better was that faith of Thomas, that would believe his eyes and hands though his ears he would not? O the deep infidelity of these Israelites, that saw and believed not!

And how will they know if God be amongst them? as if he could not be with them, and they be athirst. Either God must humour carnal minds, or be distrusted. If they prosper, though it be with wickedness, God is with them. If they be thwarted in their own designs, straight "Is God with us?" It was the way to put God from them, to distrust and murmur. If he had not been with them, they had not lived. If he had been in them, they had not mutinied. They can think him absent in their want, and cannot see him absent in their sin; and yet wickedness, not affliction, argues him gone: yet then is he most present, when he most chastises.

Who would not have looked, that this answer of Moses should have appeased their fury? As what can still him, that will not be quiet to think he hath God for his adversary? But, as if they would wilfully war against heaven, they proceed; yet with no less craft than violence, bending their exception to one part of the answer, and smoothly omitting what they could not except against. They will not hear of tempting God; they maintain their strife with Moses, both with words and stones. How malicious, how heady is impatience! The act was God's, they cast it upon Moses; "Wherefore hast thou brought us?" The act of God was merciful, they make it cruel, "To kill us and our children;" as if God and Moses meant nothing but their ruin, who intended nothing but their life and liberty. Foolish men! what needed this journey to death? Were they not as obnoxious to God in Egypt? Could not God by Moses as easily have killed them in Egypt, or in the sea, as their enemies? Impatience is full of misconstruction. If it be possible to find out any gloss, to corrupt the text of God's actions, they shall be sure not to escape untainted.

It was no expostulating with an unreasonable multitude. Moses runs straight to him that was able at once to quench their thirst, and their fury; "What shall I do to this people?" It is the best way to trust God with his own causes. When men will be intermeddling with his affairs, they undo themselves in vain. We shall find difficulties in all great enterprises; if we be sure we have begun them from God, we may securely cast all events upon his providence, which knows how to dispose, and how to end them.

Moses perceived rage, not in the tongues only, but in the hands of the Israelites; "Yet a while longer, and they will stone me." Even the leader of God's people feared death, and sinned not in fearing. Life is worthy to be dear to all; especially to him whom public charge hath made necessary. Mere fear is not sinful; it is impotence and distrust that accompany it, which make it evil. How well is that fear bestowed, that sends us the more importunately to God! Some men would have thought of flight: Moses flies to his prayers; and that not for revenge, but for help. Who but Moses would not have said, This twice they have mutinied, and been pardoned; and now again thou seest, O Lord, how madly they rebel, and how bloodily they intend against me! Preserve me, I beseech thee, and plague them. I hear none of this; but, imitating the long suffering of his God, he seeks to God for them, which sought to kill him for the quarrel of God.

Neither is God sooner sought than found. All Israel might see Moses go towards the rock: none but the elders might see him strike it. Their unbelief made them unworthy of this privilege. It is no small favour of God to make us witnesses of his great works; that he crucifies his Son before us, that he fetches the water of life out of the true rock in our sight, is a high prerogative: if his rigour would have taken it, our infidelity had equally excluded us, whom now his mercy hath received.

Moses must take his rod; God could have done it by his will, without a word, or by his word, without the rod; but he will do by means, that which he can as easily do without. There was no virtue in the rod, none in the stroke; but all in the command of God. Means must be used, and yet their efficacy must be expected out of themselves.

It doth not suffice God to name the rod, without a description; "Whereby thou smotest the river." Wherefore? but to strengthen the faith of Moses, that he might well expect this wonder from that which he had tried to be miraculous. How could he but firmly believe, that the same means which turned the waters into blood, and turned the sea into a wall, could as well turn the stone into water? Nothing more raises up the heart in present affiance, than the recognition of favours, or wonders passed. Behold, the same rod that brought plagues to the Egyptians, brings deliverances to Israel. By the same means can God save and condemn; like as the same sword defends and kills.

That power which turned the wings of the quails to the wilderness, turned the course of the water through the rock. He might, if he had pleased, have caused a spring to well out of the plain earth; but he will now fetch it out of the stone, to convince and shame their infidelity.

What is more hard and dry than the rock? what more moist and supple than water? That they may be ashamed to think they distrusted, lest God could bring them water out of the clouds or springs, the very rock shall yield it.

And now, unless their hearts had been more rocky than this stone, they could not but have resolved them into tears for this diffidence.

I wonder to see these Israelites fed with sacraments: their bread was sacramental, whereof they communicated every day. Lest any man should complain of frequence, the Israelites received daily; and now their drink was sacramental, that the ancient church may give no warrant of a dry communion.

Twice, therefore, hath the rock yielded them water of refreshing; to signify that the true spiritual Rock yields it always. The rock that followed them was Christ. Out of thy side, O Saviour, issued that bloody stream, whereby the thirst of all believers is comfortably quenched. Let us but thirst (not with repining, but with faith); this rock of thine shall abundantly flow forth to our souls, and follow us, till this water be changed into that new wine, which we shall drink with thee in thy Father's kingdom.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—THE FOIL OF AMALEK: OR THE HAND OF MOSES LIFT UP.

No sooner is Israel's thirst slacked, than God hath an Amalekite ready to assault them. The Almighty hath choice of rods to whip us with, and will not be content with one trial. They would needs be quarrelling with Moses without a cause; and now God sends the Amalekites to quarrel with them. It is just with God, that they which would be contending with their best friends, should have work enough of contending with enemies.

In their passage out of Egypt, God would not lead them the nearest way, by the Philistines' land, lest they should repent at the sight of war; now they both see and feel it. He knows how to make the fittest choice of the times of evil, and withholds that one while, which he sends another, not without a just reason why he sends and withholds it: and though to us they come ever, as we think, unseasonably, and at some times more unfitly than others, yet He that sends them knows their opportunities.

Who would not have thought a worse time could never have been picked for Israel's war than now? In the feebleness of their troops, when they were wearied, thirsty, unweaponed; yet now must the Amalekites do that, which before the Philistines might not do. We are not worthy, not able to choose for ourselves.

To be sick, and die in the strength of youth, in the minority of children; to be pinched with poverty, or miscarriage of children in our age, —how harshly unseasonable it seems! But the infinite wisdom that orders our events, knows how to order our times. Unless we will be shameless unbelievers, O Lord, we must trust thee with ourselves and our seasons, and know, that not that which we desire, but that which thou hast appointed, is the fittest time for our sufferings.

Amalek was Esau's grandchild, and these Israelites the sons of Jacob. The abode of Amalek was not so far from Egypt, but they might well hear what became of their cousins of Israel: and now, doubtless out of envy, watched their opportunityof revenge for their old grudge. Malice is commonly hereditary and runs in the blood, and, as we used to say of runnet, the older it is, the stronger.

Hence is that foolish hostility which some men unjustly nourish upon no other grounds, than the quarrels of their forefathers. To wreck our malice upon posterity, is, at the best, but the humour of an Amalekite.

How cowardly and how crafty was this skirmish of Amalek! They do not bid them battle in fair terms of war, but without all noise of warning, come stealing upon the hindmost, and fall upon the weak and scattered remnants of Israel.

There is no looking for favour at the hands of malice: the worst that either force or fraud can do, must be expected of an adversary; but much more of our spiritual enemy, by how much his hatred is deeper. Behold, this Amalek lies in ambush to hinder our passage unto our land of promise, and subtilely takes all advantages of our weaknesses. We cannot be wise or safe if we stay behind our colours, and strengthen not those parts where is most peril of opposition.

I do not hear Moses say to his Joshua, Amalek is come up against us, it matters not whether thou go against him or not; or if thou go, whether alone or with company; or if accompanied, whether with many or few, strong or weak; or if strong men, whether they fight or no; I will pray on the hill: but, "Choose us out men, and go fight."

Then only can we pray with hope when we have done our best. And though the means cannot effect that which we desire, yet God will have us use the likeliest means on our part to effect it. Where it comes immediately from the charge of God, any means are effectual: one stick of wood shall fetch water out of the rock, another shall fetch bitterness out of the water: but in those projects which we make for our own purposes, we must choose those helps which promise most efficacy. In vain shall Moses be upon the hill, if Joshua be not in the valley. Prayer without means is a mockery of God.

Here are two shadows of one substance; the same Christ in Joshua fights against our spiritual Amalek, and in Moses spreads out his arms upon the hill; and, in both, conquers. And why doth he climb up the hill rather than pray in the valley? Perhaps that he might have the more freedom to his thoughts, which, following the sense, are so much more heavenly, as the eyes see more of heaven. Though virtue lies not in the place, yet choice must be made of those places which may be the most help to our devotion; perhaps that he might be in the eye of Israel.

The presence and sight of the leader gives heart to the people: neither doth any thing more move the multitude than example. A public person cannot hide himself in the valley; but yet it becomes him best to show himself upon the hill.

The hand of Moses must be raised, but not empty; neither is it his own rod that he holds, but God's. In the first meeting of God with Moses, the rod was Moses' it is like, for the use of his trade; now the propriety is altered: God hath so wrought by it, that now he challenges it, and Moses dare not call it his own.

Those things which it pleases God to use for his own service, are now changed in their condition. The bread of the sacrament was once the baker's, now it is God's: the water was once every man's, now it is the laver of regeneration. It is both unjust and unsafe to hold those things common wherein God hath a peculiarity.

At other times, upon occasion of the plagues, and of the quails, and of the rock, he was commanded to take the rod in his hand, now he doth it unbidden. He doth it not now for miraculous operation, but for encouragement.

For when the Israelites should cast up their eyes to the hill, and see

Moses and his rod, (the man and the means that had wrought so powerfully for them,) they could not but take heart to themselves, and think, There is the man that delivered us from the Egyptian; why not now from the Amalekite? There is the rod which turned waters to blood, and brought varieties of plagues on Egypt; why not now on Amalek?

Nothing can more hearten our faith, than the view of the monuments of God's favour: if ever we have found any word or act of God cordial to us, it is good to fetch it forth oft to the eye. The renewing of our sense and remembrance, makes every gift of God perpetually beneficial.

If Moses had received a command, that rod, which fetched water from the rock, could as well have fetched the blood of the Amalekites out of their bodies. God will not work miracles always; neither must we expect them unbidden.

Not as a standard-bearer, so much as a suppliant, doth Moses lift up his hand. The gesture of the body should both express and further the piety of the soul. This flesh of ours is not a good servant, unless it help us in the best offices. The God of spirits doth more respect the soul of our devotion; yet it is both unmannerly and irreligious to be misgestured in our prayers. The careless and uncomely carriage of the body helps both to signify and make a profane soul.

The hand and the rod of Moses never moved in vain; though the rod did not strike Amalek, as it had done the rock, yet it smote heaven, and fetched down victory. And that the Israelites might see the hand of Moses had a greater stroke in the fight than all theirs, the success must rise and fall with it. Amalek rose, and Israel fell, with his hand falling: Amalek fell and Israel rises with his hand raised. O the wondrous power of the prayers of faith! All heavenly favours are derived to us from this channel of grace. To these are we beholden for our peace, preservations, and all the rich mercies of God which we enjoy. We could not want, if we could ask.

Every man's hand would not have done this, but the hand of a Moses. A faithless man may as well hold his hand and tongue still; he may bauble, but prays not; he prays ineffectually, and receives not: only the prayer of the righteous availeth much; and only the believer is righteous.

There can be no merit, no recompense answerable to a good man's prayer; for heaven, and the ear of God, is open to him; but the formal devotions of an ignorant and faithless man, are not worth that crust of bread which he asks: yea, it is presumption in himself, how should it be beneficial to others? It profanes the name of God, instead of adoring.

But how justly is the fervency of the prayer added to the righteousness of the person! When Moses' hand slackened, Amalek prevailed. No Moses can have his hand ever up; it is a title proper to God, that his hands are stretched out still, whether to mercy or vengeance. Our infirmity will not suffer any long intention, either of body or mind. Long prayers can hardly maintain their vigour, as in tall bodies the spirits are diffused. The strongest hand will languish with long extending: and when our devotion tires, it is seen in the success; then straight our Amalek prevails. Spiritual wickednesses are mastered by vehement prayer, and, by heartlessness in prayer, overcome us.

Moses had two helps, a stone to sit on, and a hand to raise his: and his sitting and holpen hand is no less effectual. Even in our prayers will God allow us to respect our own infirmities. In cases of our necessity, he regards not the posture of body, but the affections of the soul.

Doubtless Aaron and Hur did not only raise their hands, but their minds with his. The more cords, the easier draught. Aaron was brother to Moses: there cannot be a more brotherly office, than to help one another in our prayers, and to excite our mutual devotions. No Christian may think it enough to pray alone. He is no true Israelite, that will not be ready to lift up the weary hands of God's saints.

All Israel saw this: or if they were so intent upon the slaughter and spoil, that they observed it not, they might hear it after from Aaron and Hur; yet this contents not God: It must be written. Many other miracles had God done before, not one directly commanded to be recorded: the other were only for the wonder, this for the imitation of God's people. In things that must live by report, every tongue adds or detracts something. The word once written is both unalterable and permanent.

As God is careful to maintain the glory of his miraculous victory, so is Moses desirous to second him; God by a book, and Moses by an altar, and a name. God commands to enrol it in parchment; Moses registers it in the stones of his altar, which he raises not only for future memory, but for present use. That hand which was weary of lifting up, straight offers a sacrifice of praise to God. How well it becomes the just to be thankful! Even very nature teacheth us men to abhor ingratitude in small favours; how much less can that fountain of goodness abide to be laded at with unthankful hands! O God, we cannot but confess our deliverances! Where are our altars? Where are our sacrifices? Where is our Jehovah-nissi? I do not more wonder, at thy power in preserving us, than at thy mercy, which is not weary of casting away favours upon the ungrateful.

CONTEMPLATION V.—OF THE LAW.

It is but about seven weeks since Israel came out of Egypt; in which space God had cherished their faith by five several wonders; yet now he thinks it time to give them statutes from heaven, as well as bread. The manna and water from the rock (which was Christ in the gospel) were given before the law; the sacraments of grace before the legal covenant. The grace of God preventeth our obedience, therefore should we keep the law of God, because we have a Saviour. O the mercy of our God! which, before we see what we are bound to do, shows us our remedy, if we do it not. How can our faith disannul the law, when it was before it? It may help to fulfil that which shall be, it cannot frustrate that which was not. The letters which God had written in our fleshy tables, were now (as those which are carved in some barks) almost grown out: he saw it time to write them in dead tables, whose hardness should not be capable of alteration. He knew, that the stone would be more faithful than our hearts.

O marvellous accordance betwixt the two testaments! In the very time of their delivery, there is the same agreement which is in the substance. The ancient Jews kept our feasts, and we still keep theirs. The feast of the passover is the time of Christ's resurrection; then did he pass from under the bondage of death. Christ is our passover, the spotless Lamb; whereof not a bone must be broken. The very day wherein God came down in fire and thunder to deliver the law, even the same day came also the Holy Ghost down upon the disciples in fiery tongues, for the propagation of the gospel. That other was in fire and smoke, obscurity was mingled with terror; this was in fire without smoke, befitting the light and clearness of the gospel; fire, not in flashes, but in tongues; not to terrify, but to instruct. The promulgation of the law makes way for the law of the gospel. No man receives the Holy Ghost, but he which hath felt the terrors of Sinai.

God might have imposed upon them a law by force; they were his creatures, and he could require nothing but justice. It had been but equal, that they should be compelled to obey their Maker; yet that God which loves to do all things sweetly, gives the law of justice in mercy, and will not imperiously command, but craves our assent for that, which it were rebellion not to do.

How gentle should be the proceeding of fellow-creatures, who have an equality of being, with an inequality of condition! when their infinite Maker requests, where he might constrain! God will make no covenant with the unwilling; how much less the covenant of grace, which stands all upon love? If we stay till God offer violence to our will, or to us against our will, we shall die strangers from him. The church is the spouse of Christ: he will enjoy her love by a willing contract, not by a ravishment. The obstinate have nothing to do with God. The title of all converts is, a willing people.

That Israel inclined to God, it was from God. He inquires after his own gifts in us, for our capacity of more. They had not received the law, unless they had first received a disposition fit to be commanded. As there was an inclination to hear, so there must be a preparation for hearing. God's justice had before prepared his Israelites by hunger, thirst, fear of enemies; his mercy had prepared them by deliverances, by provisions of water, meat, bread; and yet, besides all the sight of God in his miracles, they must be three days prepared to hear him. When our souls are at the best, our approach to God requires particular addresses; and if three days were little enough to prepare them to receive the law, how is all our life short enough to prepare for the reckoning of our observing it? And if the word of a command expected such readiness, what shall the word of promise, the promise of Christ and salvation?

The murrain of Egypt was not so infectious as their vices; the contagion of these stuck still by Israel. All the water of the Red Sea, and of Marah, and that which gushed out of the rock, had not washed it off. From these they must now be sanctified. As sin is always dangerous, so most when we bring it into God's sight: it envenometh both our persons and services, and turns our good into evil. As therefore we must be always holy, so most when we present ourselves to the holy eyes of our Creator. We wash our hands every day; but, when we are to sit with some great person, we scour them with balls. And if we must be so sanctified only to receive the law, how holy must we be to receive the grace promised in the gospel?

Neither must themselves only be cleansed, but their very clothes. their garments smelt of Egypt; even they must be washed. Neither can clothes be capable of sin, nor can water cleanse from sin. The danger was neither in their garment nor their skins; yet they must be washed, that they might learn by their clothes, with what souls to appear before their God. Those garments must be washed, which should never wax old, that now they might begin their age in purity; as those which were in more danger of being foul than bare. It is fit that our reverence to God's presence should appear in our very garments, that both without and within we may be cleanly; but little would neatness of vestures avail us with a filthy soul. The God of spirits looks to the inner man, and challenges the purity of that part which resembles himself; "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purge your hearts, ye double-minded."

Yet even when they were washed and sanctified, they may not touch the mount, not only with their feet, but not with their eyes. The smoke keeps it from their eyes, the marks from their feet. Not only men, that had some impurity at their best, are restrained, but even beasts, which are not capable of any unholiness. Those beasts which must touch his altars, yet might not touch his hill. And if a beast touch it, he must die; yet so, as no hands may touch that which hath touched the hill. Unreasonableness might seem to be an excuse in these creatures: that, therefore, which is death to a beast, must needs be capital to them, whose reason should guide them to avoid presumption. Those Israelites which saw God every day in the pillar of fire, and the cloud, must not come near him in the mount. God loves at once familiarity and fear; familiarity in our conversation, and fear in his commands. He loves to be acquainted with men in the walks of their obedience; yet he takes state upon him in his ordinances, and will be trembled at in his word and judgments.

I see the difference of God's carriage to men in the law, and in the gospel. There, the very hill where he appeared may not be touched by the purest Israelite. Here, the hem of his garment is touched by the woman that had the flux of blood; yea, his very face was touched with the lips of Judas. There the very earth was prohibited them, on which he descended. Here, his very body and blood is proffered to our touch and taste. O the marvellous kindness of our God! How unthankful are we, if we do not acknowledge this mercy above his ancient people! They were his own; yet strangers, in comparison of our liberty. It is our shame and sin, if, in these means of entireness, we be no better acquainted with God than they, which in their greatest familiarity were commanded aloof.

God was ever wonderful in his works, and fearful in his judgments; but he was never so terrible in the execution of his will, as now in the promulgation of it. Here was nothing but a majestical terror in the eyes, in the ears of the Israelites, as if God meant to show them by this how fearful he could be. Here was the lightning darted in their eyes, the thunders roaring in their ears, the trumpet of God drowning the thunder-claps, the voice of God out-speaking the trumpet of the angel: the cloud enwrapping, the smoke ascending, the fire flaming, the mount trembling, Moses climbing and quaking, paleness and death in the face of Israel, uproar in the elements, and all the glory of heaven turned into terror. In the destruction of the first world, there were clouds without fire. In the destruction of Sodom, there was fire raining without clouds; but here was fire, smoke, clouds, thunder, earthquakes, and whatsoever might work more astonishment than ever was in any vengeance inflicted.

And if the law were thus given, how shall it be required? If such were the proclamation of God's statutes, what shall the sessions be? I see and tremble at the resemblance. The trumpet of the angel called unto the one: the voice of an archangel, the trumpet of God, shall summon us to the other. To the one, Moses (that climbed up that hill, and alone saw it) says, "God came with ten thousands of his saints." In the other, "Thousand thousands shall minister to him, and ten thousand thousands shall stand before him." In the one, mount Sinai only was on a flame; all the world shall be so in the other. In the one, there was fire, smoke, thunder, and lightning; in the other a fiery stream shall issue from him, wherewith the heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt away with a noise. O God, how powerful art thou to inflict vengeance upon sinners, who didst thus forbid sin! And if thou wert so terrible a lawgiver, what a judge shalt thou appear! What shall become of the breakers of so fiery a law! O where shall those appear, that are guilty of the transgressing that law, whose very delivery was little less than death! If our God should exact his law but in the same rigour wherewith he gave it, sin could not quit the cost. But now the fire, wherein it was delivered, was but terrifying; the fire, wherein it shall be required, is consuming. Happy are those that are from under the terrors of that law, which was given in fire, and in fire shall be required.

God would have Israel see, that they had not to do with some impotent commander, that is fain to publish his laws, without noise, in dead paper, which can more easily enjoin than punish, or descry than execute; and therefore, before he gives them a law, he shows them that he can command heaven, earth, fire, air, in revenge of the breach of the law, that they could not but think it deadly to displease such a lawgiver, or violate such dreadful statutes; that they might see all the elements examples of that obedience which they should yield unto their Maker.

This fire, wherein the law was given, is still in it, and will never out: hence are those terrors which it flashes in every conscience that hath felt remorse of sin. Every man's heart is a Sinai, and resembles to him both heaven and hell. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law."

That they might see he could find out their closest sins, he delivers his law in the light of fire from out of the smoke. That they might see what is due to their sins, they see fire above, to represent the fire that should be below them. That they might know he could waken their security, the thunder and louder voice of God speaks to their hearts. That they might see what their hearts should do, the earth quakes under them. That they might see they could not shift their appearance, the angel calls them together. O royal law, and mighty lawgiver! how could they think of having any other God, that had such proofs of this! How could they think of making any resemblance of him, whom they saw could not be seen, and whom they saw, in not being seen, infinite! How could they think of daring to profane his name, whom they heard to name himself, with that voice, Jehovah! How could they think of standing with him for a day, whom they saw to command that heaven which makes and measures day! How could they think of disobeying his deputies, whom they saw so able to revenge! How could they think of killing, when they were half dead with the fear of him that could kill both body and soul! How could they think of the flames of lust, that saw such fires of vengeance! How could they think of stealing from others, that saw whose the heaven and the earth was, to dispose of at his pleasure! How could they think of speaking falsely, that heard God speak in so fearful a tone! How could they think of coveting others' goods, that saw how weak and uncertain right they had to their own! Yea, to us was this law so delivered, to us in them. Neither had there been such state in the promulgation of it, if God had not intended it for eternity. We men, that so fear the breach of human laws, for some small mulcts of forfeiture, how should we fear thee, O Lord, that canst cast body and soul into hell!

CONTEMPLATION VI.—OF THE GOLDEN CALF.

It was not much above a month since Israel made their covenant with God, since they trembled to hear him say, "Thou shalt have no other God but me;" since they saw Moses part from them, and climb up the hill to God; and now they say, "Make us gods: we know not what is become of this Moses." O ye mad Israelites, have ye so soon forgotten that fire and thunder which you heard and saw? Is that smoke vanished out of your mind, as soon as out of your sight? Could your hearts cease to tremble with the earth? Can ye, in the very sight of Sinai, call for other gods? And for Moses, was it not for your sakes that he thrust himself into the midst of that smoke and fire, which ye feared to see afar off? Was he not now gone after so many sudden embassages, to be your lieger with God? If ye had seen him take his heels, and run away from you into the wilderness, what could ye have said or done more? Behold, our better Moses was with us awhile upon earth: he is now ascended into the mount of heaven to mediate for us: shall we now think of another Saviour? Shall we not hold it our happiness, that he is for our sakes above?

And what if your Moses had been gone for ever? Must ye therefore have gods made? If ye had said, Choose us another governor, it had been a wicked and unthankful motion; ye were too unworthy of a Moses, that could so soon forget him. But to say, "Make us gods," was absurdly impious. Moses was not your god, but your governor: neither was the presence of God tied to Moses. You saw God still, when he was gone, in his pillar, and in his manna; and yet ye say, "Make us gods." Every word is full of senseless wickedness. How many gods would you have? Or what gods are those that can be made! Or, whatever the idolatrous Egyptians did, with what face can ye, after so many miraculous obligations, speak of another god? Had the voice of God scarce done thundering in your ears? Did ye so lately hear and see him to be an infinite God? Did ye quake to hear him say out of the midst of the flames, "I am Jehovah thy God; thou shalt have no gods but me?" Did ye acknowledge God your Maker; and do ye now speak of making of gods? If ye had said, Make us another man to go before us, it had been an impossible suit. Aaron might help to mar you and himself; he could not make one hair of a man: and do ye say, "Make us gods?" And what should these gods do? "Go before you?" How could they go before you, that cannot stand alone? Your help makes them to stand, and yet they must conduct you. O the impatient ingratitude of carnal minds! O the sottishness of idolatry! Who would not have said, Moses is not with us; but he is with God for us? He stays long. He that called him, withholds him. His delay is for our sakes, as well as his ascent. Though we see him not, we will hope for him. His favours to us have deserved not to be rejected: or, if God will keep him from us, he that withholds him, can supply him. He that sent him, can lead us without him; his fire and cloud is all-sufficient. God hath said, and done enough for us, to make us trust him. We will, we can, have no other God; we care not for any other guide. But, behold, here is none of this. Moses stays but some five and thirty days, and now he is forgotten, and is become but this Moses; yea, God is forgotten with him; and, as if God and Moses had been lost at once, they say, "Make us gods." Natural men must have God at their beck; and if he come not at a call, he is cast off, and they take themselves to their own shifts; like as the Chinese whip their gods when they answer them not; whereas his holy ones wait long, and seek him; and not only in their sinking, but from the bottom of the deeps, call upon him; "And though he kill them, will trust in him."

Superstition besots the minds of men, and blinds the eye of reason; and first makes them not men, ere it makes them idolaters. How else could he, that is the image of God, fall down to the images of creatures? How could our forefathers have so doated upon stocks and stones, if they had been themselves? As the Syrians were first blinded, and then led into the midst of Samaria; so are idolaters first bereaved of their wits and common sense, and afterwards are carried brutishly into all palpable impiety.

Who would not have been ashamed to hear this answer from the brother of Moses, "Pluck off your ear-rings?" He should have said, "Pluck this idolatrous thought out of your hearts." And now, instead of chiding, he soothes them. And, as if he had been no kin to Moses, he helps to lead them back again from God to Egypt. The people importuned him, perhaps with threats. He that had waded through all the menaces of Pharaoh, doth he now shrink at the threats of his own? Moses is not afraid of the terrors of God: his faith, that carried him through the water, led him up to the fire of God's presence; while his brother Aaron fears the faces of those men, which he lately saw pale with the fear of their glorious Lawgiver: as if he, that forbade other gods, could not have maintained his own act and agent against men. Sudden fears, when they have possessed weak minds, lead them to shameful errors. Importunity or violence may lessen, but they cannot excuse a fault. Wherefore was he a governor, but to depress their disordered motions? Facility of yielding to a sin, or wooing it with our voluntary suit, is a higher stair of evil; but even at last to be won to sin, is damnable. It is good to resist any onset of sin; but one condescent loses all the thanks of our opposition. What will it avail a man that others are plagued for soliciting him, while he smarteth for yielding? If both be in hell, what ease is it to him that another is deeper in the pit?

What now did Aaron? Behold, he that alone was allowed to climb up the trembling and fiery hill of Sinai with Moses, and heard God say, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, for I am a jealous God," as if he meant particularly to prevent this act,—within one month, calls for their ear-rings, makes the graven image of a calf, erects an altar, consecrates a day to it, calls it their god, and weeps not to see them dance before it. It is a miserable thing, when governors humour the people in their sins, and instead of making up the breach, enlarge it. Sin will take heart by the approbation of the meanest looker on; but, if authority once second it, it grows impudent. As contrarily, where the public government opposes evil, though it be under-hand practised, not without fear, there is life in that state.

Aaron might have learned counsel of his brother's example. When they came to him with stones in their hands, and said, "Give us water," he ran as roundly to God with prayers in his mouth; so should Aaron have done, when they said, "Give us gods;" but he weakly runs to their ear-rings, that which should be made their god, not to the true God which they had, and forsook. Who can promise to himself freedom from gross infirmities, when he that went up into the mount comes down, and doth that in the valley which he heard forbidden in the hill?

I see yet, and wonder at the mercy of that God which had justly called himself jealous. This very Aaron, whose infirmity had yielded to so foul an idolatry, is after chosen by God to be a priest to himself. He that had set up an altar to the calf, must serve at the altar of God. He that had melted and carved out the calf for a god, must sacrifice calves and rams and bullocks unto the true God. He that consecrated a day to the idol, is himself consecrated to him which was dishonoured by the idol. The grossest of all sins cannot prejudice the calling of God; yea, as light is best seen in darkness, the mercy of God is most magnified in our unworthiness.

What a difference God puts between persons and sins! While so many thousand Israelites were slain, that had stomachfully desired the idol, Aaron, that in weakness condescended, is both pardoned the fact, and afterwards laden with honour from God. Let no man take heart to sin, from mercy. He that can purpose to sin upon the knowledge of God's mercy in the remission of infirmities, presumes, and makes himself a wilful offender. It is no comfort to the wilful that there is remission to the weak and penitent.

The ear-rings are plucked off. Egyptian jewels are fit for an idolatrous use. This very gold was contagious. It had been better the Israelites had never borrowed these ornaments, than that they should pay them back to the idolatry of their first owners. What cost the superstitious Israelites are content to be at for this lewd devotion! The riches and pride of their outward habit, are they willing to part with to their molten god; as glad to have their ears bare, that they might fill their eyes. No gold is too dear for their idol: each man is content to spoil his wives and children of that whereof they spoiled the Egyptians.

Where are those worldlings that cannot abide to be at any cost for their religion, which could be content to do God chargeless service? These very Israelites that were ready to give gold, not out of their purses, but from their very ear, to misdevotion, shall once condemn them. O sacrilege succeeding to superstition! Of old they were ready to give gold to the false service of God; we, to take away gold from the true. How do we see men prodigal to their lusts and ambitions, and we hate not to be niggards to God!

This gold is now grown to a calf. Let no man think that form came forth casually, out of the melted ear-rings. This shape was intended by the Israelites, and perfected by Aaron. They brought this god in their hearts with them out of Egypt, and now they set it up in their eyes. Still doth Egypt hurt them. Servitude was the least evil that Israel receives from Egypt; for that sent them still to the true God, but this idolatrous example led them to a false. The very sight of evil is dangerous; and it is hard for the heart not to run into those sins, to which the eye and ear is innured. Not out of love, but custom, we fall into some offences.

The Israelites wrought so long in the furnaces of the Egyptians' brick, that they have brought forth a molten calf. The black calf with the white spots, which they saw worshipped in Egypt, hath stolen their hearts; and they which before would have been at the Egyptian flesh-pots, would now be at their devotions. How many have fallen into a fashion of swearing, scoffing, drinking, out of the usual practice of others; as those that live in an ill air are infected with diseases. A man may pass through Ethiopia unchanged, but he cannot dwell there and not be discoloured.

Their sin was bad enough, let not our uncharitableness make it worse. No man may think they have so put off humanity, and sense, with their religion, as to think that calf a god, or that this idol, which they saw yesterday made, did bring them out of Egypt, three months ago: this were to make them more beasts than that calf which this image represented. Or, if they should have been so insensate, can we think that Aaron could be thus desperately mad? The image and the holy day were both to one deity. "To-morrow is the holy day of the Lord your God." It was the true God they meant to worship in the calf; and yet at best this idolatry is shameful. It is no marvel if this foul sin seeks pretences; yet no excuse can hide the shame of such a face. God's jealousy is not stirred only by the rivality of a false god, but of a false worship. Nothing is more dangerous than to mint God's services in our own brain.

God sends down Moses to remedy this sin. He could as easily have prevented, as redressed it. He knew ere Moses came up what Israel would do ere he came down; like as he knew the two tables would be broken, ere he gave them. God most wisely permits and ordinates sin to his own ends, without our excuse: and though he could easily by his own hands remedy evils, yet he will do it by means both ordinary and subordinate. It is not for us to look for any immediate redress from God, when we have a Moses, by whom it may be wrought. Since God himself expects this from man, why should man expect it from God?

Now might Moses have found a time to have been even with Israel for all their unthankfulness, and mutinous insurrections: "Let me alone; I will consume them, and make of thee a mighty nation." Moses should not need to solicit God for revenge; God solicits him, in a sort, for leave to revenge. Who would look for such a word from God to man, "Let me alone?" As yet Moses had said nothing; before he opens his mouth, God prevents his importunity, as foreseeing that holy violence which the requests of Moses would offer to him. Moses stood trembling before the majesty of his Maker; and yet hears him say, "Let me alone." The mercy of our God hath, as it were, obliged his power to the faith of men. The fervent prayers of the faithful hold the hands of the Almighty. As I find it said afterwards of Christ, That "he could do no miracles there, because of their unbelief:" so now I hear God (as if he could not do execution upon Israel, because of Moses' faith) say, "Let me alone, that I may consume them."

We all naturally affect propriety, and like our own so much better, as it is freer from partners. Every one would be glad to say, with that proud one, "I am, and there is none beside me:" so much the more sweetly would this message have sounded to nature, "I will consume them, and make of thee a mighty nation." How many endeavour that, not without danger of curses and uproar, which was voluntarily tendered unto Moses! Whence are our depopulations and inclosures, but for that men cannot abide either fellows or neighbours? But how graciously doth Moses strive with God, against his own preferment! If God had threatened, "I will consume thee, and make of them a mighty nation," I doubt whether he could have been more moved. The more a man can leave himself behind him, and aspire to a care of community, the more spiritual he is. Nothing makes a man so good a patriot as religion.

O the sweet disposition of Moses, fit for him that should be familiar with God! He saw they could be content to be merry and happy without him; he would not be happy without them. They had professed to have forgotten him: he slacks not to sue for them. He that will ever hope for good himself, must return good for evil unto others.

Yea, it was not Israel so much that Moses respected, as God in Israel. He was thrifty and jealous for his Maker; and would not have him lose the glory of his mighty deliverances; nor would abide a pretence for any Egyptian dog to bark against the powerful work of God; "Wherefore shall the Egyptians say?" If Israel could have perished without dishonour to God, perhaps his hatred to their idolatry would have overcome his natural love, and he had let God alone. Now so tender is he over the name of God, that he would rather have Israel escape with a sin, than God's glory should be blemished, in the opinions of men, by a just judgment. He saw that the eyes and tongues of all the world were intent upon Israel, a people so miraculously fetched from Egypt, whom the sea gave way to; whom Heaven fed; whom the rock watered; whom the fire and cloud guarded; which heard the audible voice of God. He knew withal, how ready the world would be to misconstrue, and how the heathens would be ready to cast imputations of levity or impotence upon God; and therefore says, "What will the Egyptians say?" Happy is that man, which can make God's glory the scope of all his actions and desires; neither cares for his own welfare, nor fears the miseries of others, but with respect to God in both. If God had not given Moses this care of his glory, he could not have had it: and now his goodness takes it so kindly, as if himself had received a favour from his creature; and, for a reward of the grace he had wrought, promises not to do that which he threatened. But what needs God to care for the speech of the Egyptians, men, infidels? And if they had been good, yet their censure should have been unjust. Shall God care for the tongues of men; the holy God for the tongues of infidels? The very Israelites, now they were from under the hands of Egypt, cared not for their words; and shall the God of heaven regard that which is not worth the regard of men? Their tongues could not talk against God, but from himself; and if it could have been the worse for him, would he have permitted it? But, O God, how dainty art thou of thine honour, that thou canst not endure the worst of men should have any colour to taint it! What, do we men stand upon our justice and innocence, with neglect of all unjust censures, when that infinite God, whom no censures can reach, will not abide that the very Egyptians should falsely tax his power and mercy! Wise men must care, not only to deserve well, but to hear well, and to wipe off, not only crimes, but censures.

There was never so precious a monument, as the tables written with God's own hand. If we see but the stone which Jacob's head rested on, or, on which the foot of Christ did once tread, we look upon it with more than ordinary respect. With what eye should we have beheld this stone, which was hewed, and written with the very finger of God? Any manuscript scroll, written by the hand of a famous man, is laid up amongst our jewels; what place then should we have given to the hand-writing of the Almighty?

That which he hath dictated to his servants the prophets, challenges just honour from us: how doth that deserve veneration, which his own hand wrote immediately?

Prophecies and evangelical discourses he hath written by others; never did he write any thing himself, but these tables of the law; neither did he ever speak any thing audibly to whole mankind, but it. The hand, the stone, the law, were all his. By how much more precious this record was, by so much was the fault greater of defacing it. What king holds it less than rebellion, to tear his writing, and blemish his seal? At the first he engraved his image in the table of man's heart; Adam blurred the image, but, through God's mercy, saved the tablet. Now he writes his will in the tables of stone; Moses breaks the tables, and defaced the writing. If they had been given him for himself, the author, the matter had deserved, that as they were written in stone for permanency, so they should be kept for ever; and, as they were everlasting in use, so they should be in preservation. Had they been written in clay, they could but have been broken; but now they were given for all Israel, for all mankind. He was but the messenger, not the owner. Howsoever therefore Israel had deserved, by breaking this covenant with God, to have this monument of God's covenant with them broken by the same hand that wrote it; yet how durst Moses thus carelessly cast away the treasure of all the world, and by his hands undo that which was with such cost and care done by his Creator? How durst he fail the trust of that God, whose pledge he received with awe and reverence?

He that expostulated with God. to have Israel live and prosper, why would he deface the rule of their life, in the keeping whereof they should prosper? I see that forty days' talk with God cannot bereave a man of passionate infirmity. He that was the meekest upon earth, in a sudden indignation, abandons that, which, in cold blood, he would have held faster than his life. He forgets the law written, when he saw it broken. His zeal for God hath transported him from himself, and his duty to the charge of God. He more hates the golden calf, wherein he saw engraven the idolatry of Israel, than he honoured the tables of stone, wherein God had engraven his commandments; and more longed to deface the idol, than he cared to preserve the tables. Yet that God, which so sharply revenged the breach of one law upon the Israelites, checks not Moses for breaking both the tables of the law. The law of God is spiritual. The internal breach of one law is so heinous, that, in comparison of it, God scarce counts the breaking of the outward tables a breach of the law. The goodness of God winks at the errors of honest zeal, and so loves the strength of good affections, that it passeth over their infirmities. How highly God doth esteem a well-governed zeal, when his mercy crowns it with all the faults!

The tables had not offended; the calf had, and Israel in it. Moses takes revenge on both; he burns and stamps the calf to powder, and gives it Israel to drink, that they might have it in their belly, instead of their eyes. How he hasteth to destroy the idol, wherein they sinned! That, as an idol is nothing, so it might be brought to nothing; and atoms and dust is nearest to nothing; that, instead of going before Israel, it might pass through them, so as the next day they might find their god in their excrements, to the just shame of Israel, when they should see their new god cannot defend himself from being either nothing, or worse.

Who can but wonder, to see a multitude of so many hundred thousands (when Moses came running down the hill) to turn their eyes from their god, to him; and, on a sudden, instead of worshipping their idol, to batter it in pieces, in the very height of the novelty. Instead of building altars, and kindling fires to it, to kindle a hotter fire than that, wherewith it was melted, to consume it? Instead of dancing before it, to abhor and deface it? instead of singing, to weep before it? There was never a more stiff-necked people: yet I do not hear any one man of them say, He is but one man; we are many; how easily may we destroy him, rather than be our god? If his brother durst not resist our motion in making it, why will we suffer him to dare to resist the keeping of it? It is our act, and we will maintain it. Here was none of this, but an humble obeisance to the basest and bloodiest revenge that Moses shall impose. God hath set such an impression of majesty in the face of lawful authority, that wickedness is confounded in itself to behold it. If from hence visible powers were not more feared than the invisible God, the world would be overrun with outrage. Sin hath a guiltiness in itself, that, when it is seasonably checked, it pulls in its head, and seeks rather a hiding-place, than a fort.

The idol is not capable of a further revenge. It is not enough, unless the idolaters smart. The gold was good, if the Israelites had not been evil; so great a sin cannot be expiated without blood. Behold that meek spirit, which, in his plea with God, would rather perish himself, than

Israel should perish, arms the Levites against their brethren, and rejoices to see thousands of the Israelites bleed, and blesses their executioners.

It was the mercy of Moses that made him cruel. He had been cruel to all, if some had not found him cruel. They are merciless hands which are not sometimes imbrued in blood. There is no less charity than justice, in punishing sinners with death: God delights no less in a killing mercy than in a pitiful justice. Some tender hearts would be ready to censure the rigour of Moses. Might not Israel have repented, and lived? Or, if they must die, must their brethren's hand be upon them? if their throats must be cut by their brethren, shall it be done in the very heat of their sin? But they must learn a difference betwixt pity and fondness, mercy and injustice. Moses had a heart as soft as theirs, but more hot; as pitiful, but wiser. He was a good physician, and saw that Israel could not live, unless he bled; he therefore lets out this corrupt blood, to save the whole body. There cannot be a better sacrifice to God, than the blood of malefactors; and this first sacrifice so pleased God in the hands of the Levites, that he would have none but them sacrifice to him for ever. The blood of the idolatrous Israelites cleared that tribe from the blood of the innocent Shechemites.

BOOK VI.

CONTEMPLATION I.—THE VEIL OF MOSES.

It is a wonder, that neither Moses nor any Israelite gathered up the shivers of the former tables. Every shred of that stone, and every letter of that writing, had been a relic worthy laying up; but he well saw how headlong the people were to superstition, and how unsafe it were to feed that disposition in them.

The same zeal that burnt the calf to ashes, concealed the ruins of this monument. Holy things, besides their use, challenge no further respect. The breaking of the tables did as good as blot out all the writing; and the writing defaced left no virtue in the stone, no reverence to it.

If God had not been friends with Israel, he had not renewed his law. As the Israelites were wilfully blind if they did not see God's anger in the tables broken, so could they not but hold it a good sign of grace, that God gave them his testimonies.

There was nothing wherein Israel outstripped all the rest of the world more, than in this privilege; the pledge of his covenant, the law written with God's own hand. Oh what a favour then is it, where God bestows his gospel upon any nation! That was but a killing letter; this is the power of God to salvation.

Never is God thoroughly displeased with any people, where that continues. For, like as those which purpose love, when they fall off, call for their tokens back again; so, when God begins once perfectly to mislike, the first thing he withdraws is his gospel.

Israel recovers this favour, but with an abatement; "Hew thee two tables." God made the first tables; the matter, the form, was his; now Moses must hew the next. As God created the first man after his own image; but that once defaced, Adam begat Cain after his own; or as the first temple rased, a second was built: yet so far short, that the Israelites wept at the sight of it. The first works of God are still the purest: those that he secondarily works by us, decline in their perfection. It was reason, that though God had forgiven Israel, they should still find they had sinned. They might see the footsteps of displeasure in the differences of the agent.

When God had told Moses before, "I will not go before Israel, but my angel shall lead them;" Moses so noted the difference, that he rested not, till God himself undertook their conduct; so might the Israelites have noted some remainders of offence, while, instead of that which his own hand did formerly make, he saith now, "Hew thee;" and yet these second tables are kept reverently in the ark, when the other lay mouldered in shivers upon Sinai: like as the repaired image of God in our regeneration is preserved, perfected, and laid up at last safe in heaven; whereas the first image of our created innocence is quite defaced: so the second temple had the glory of Christ's exhibition, though meaner in frame. The merciful respects of God are not tied to glorious outsides, or the inward worthiness of things or persons: "He hath chosen the weak and simple to confound the wise and mighty."

Yet God did this work by Moses. Moses hewed, and God wrote. Our true Moses repairs that law of God, which we, in our nature, had broken; he revives it for us, and it is accepted of God, no less than if the first characters of his law had been still entire. We can give nothing but the table; it is God that must write in it. Our hearts are but a bare board, till God, by his finger, engrave his law in them. Yea, Lord, we are a rough quarry; hew thou us out, and square us fit for thee to write upon.

Well may we marvel to see Moses, after this oversight, admitted to this charge again. Who of us would not have said, Your care indeed deserves trust? You did so carefully keep the first tables, that it would do well to trust you with such another burden.

It was good for Moses that he had to do with God, not with men. The God of mercy will not impute the slips of our infirmity to the prejudice of our faithfulness. He, that after the mis-answer of the one talent, would not trust the evil servant with a second, because he saw a wilful neglect, will trust Moses with his second law, because he saw fidelity in the worst error of his zeal. Our charity must learn, as to forgive, so to believe where we have been deceived: not that we should wilfully beguile ourselves in an unjust credulity, but that we should search diligently into the disposition of persons, and grounds of their actions. Perhaps none may be so sure as they that have once disappointed us. Yea, Moses brake the first; therefore he must hew the second. If God had broken them, he would have repaired them. The amends must be where the fault was. Both God and his church look for a satisfaction in that wherein we have offended.

It was not long since Moses' former fast of forty days; when he then came down from the hill, his first question was not for meat; and now going up again to Sinai, he takes not any repast with him. That God, which sent the quails to the host of Israel, and manna from heaven, could have fed him with dainties. He goes up confidently in a secure trust of God's provision. There is no life to that of faith. "Man lives not by bread only." The vision of God did not only satiate, but feast him. What a blessed satiety shall there be when we shall see him as he is; and he shall be all in all to us; since this very frail mortality of Moses was sustained and comforted, but with representations of his presence!

I see Moses the receiver of the law, Elias the restorer of the law, Christ the fulfiller of the old law, and author of the new, all fasting forty days; and these three great fasters I find together glorious in Mount Tabor. Abstinence merits not; for religion consists not in the belly, either full or empty. What are meats or drinks to the kingdom of God, which is, like himself, spiritual? But it prepares best for good duties. Full bellies are fitter for rest. Not the body, so much as the soul, is more active with emptiness. Hence solemn prayer takes ever fasting to attend it, and so much the rather speeds in heaven when it is so accompanied. It is good so to diet the body, that the soul may be fattened.

When Moses came down before, his eyes sparkled with anger, and his face was both interchangeably pale and red with indignation; now it is bright with glory. Before, there were the flames of fury in it; now, the beams of majesty. Moses had before spoken with God; why did not his face shine before? I cannot lay the cause upon the inward trouble of his passions, for this brightness was external. Whither shall we impute it, but to his more entireness with God?

The more familiar acquaintance we have with God, the more do we partake of him. He that passes by the fire, may have some gleams of heat; but he that stands by it, hath his colour changed. It is not possible a man should have any long conference with God, and be no whit affected. We are strangers from God,—it is no wonder if our faces be earthly; but he that sets himself apart to God, shall find a kind of majesty and awful respect put upon him in the minds of others.

How did the heart of Moses shine with illumination, when his face was thus lightsome! And if the flesh of Moses, in this base composition, so shined by conversing with God forty days in Sinai, what shall our glory be when clothed with incorruptible bodies? We shall converse with him for ever in the highest heaven.

Now his face only shone: afterwards the three disciples saw all his body shining. The nature of a glorified body, the clearer vision, the immediate presence of that fountain of glory, challenge a far greater resplendence to our faces than his. O God, we are content that our faces be blemished a while with contempt, and blubbered with tears. How can we but shine with Moses, when we shall see thee more than Moses!

The brightness of Moses' face reflected not upon his own eyes; he shone bright, and knew not of it. He saw God's face glorious; he did not think others had so seen his. How many have excellent graces, and perceive them not! Our own sense is an ill judge of God's favours to us: those that stand by, can convince us in that which we deny to ourselves. Here below, it is enough if we can shine in the eyes of others; above, we shall shine and know it. At this instant Moses sees himself shine; then he needed not. God meant not that he should more esteem himself, but that he should be more honoured of the Israelites. That other glory shall be for our own happiness, and therefore requires our knowledge.

They, that did but stand still to see anger in his face, ran away to see glory in it. Before, they had desired that God would not speak to them any more but by Moses; and now, that God doth but look upon them in Moses, they are afraid; and yet there was not more difference betwixt the voices than the faces of God and Moses. This should have drawn Israel to Moses so much the more, to have seen this impression of divinity in his face.

That which should have comforted, affrights them; yea, Aaron himself, that before went up into the mount to see and speak with God, now is afraid to see him that had seen God. Such a fear there is in guiltiness, —such confidence in innocency. When the soul is once cleared from sin, it shall run to that glory with joy, the least glimpse whereof now appals it, and sends it away in terror. How could the Israelites now choose but think, How shall we abide to look God in the face, since our eyes are dazzled with the face of Moses! And well may we still argue, if the image of God, which he hath set in the fleshy forehead of authority, daunt us, how shall we stand before the dreadful tribunal of heaven!

Moses marvels to see Israel run away from their guide, as from their enemy, and looks back to see if he could discern any new cause of fear; and not conceiving how his mild face could affright them, calls them to stay and retire.

O my people, whom do ye fly? It is for your sakes that I ascended, stayed, came down. Behold, here are no armed Levites to strike you, no Amalekites, no Egyptians to pursue you, no fires and thunders to dismay you. I have not that rod ot God in my hand, which you have seen to command the elements; or if I had, so far am I from purposing any rigour against you, that I now lately have appeased God towards you; and, lo! here the pledges of his reconciliation. God sends me to you for good; and do you run from your best friend? Whither will ye go from me, or without me? Stay, and hear the charge of that God from whom we cannot fly.

They perceive his voice the same, though his face were changed, and are persuaded to stay, and return and hear him, whom they dare not see; and now, after many doubtful paces, approaching nearer, dare tell him he was grown too glorious.

Good Moses, finding that they durst not look upon the sun of his face, clouds it with a veil; choosing rather to hide the work of God in him, than to want an opportunity of revealing God's will to his people. I do not hear him stand upon terms of reputation; if there be glory in my face, God put it there; he would not have placed it so conspicuously if he had meant it should be hid. Hide ye your faces rather, which are blemished with your sin, and look not that I should wrong God and myself, to seem less happy, in favour of your weakness. But without all self-respects, he modestly hides his glorified face, and cares not their eyes should pierce so far as to his skin on condition that his words may pierce into their ears. It is good for a man sometimes to hide his graces; some talents are best improved by being laid up. Moses had more glory by his veil than by his face. Christian modesty teaches a wise man not to expose himself to the fairest show, and to live at the utmost pitch of his strength.

There is many a rich stone laid up in the bowels of the earth, many a fair pearl laid up in the bosom of the sea, that never was seen, nor ever shall be. There is many a goodly star, which, because of height, comes not within our account. How did our true Moses, with the veil of his flesh, hide the glory of his deity, and put on vileness, besides the laying aside of majesty, and shut up his great and divine miracles with, "See you tell no man!" How far are those spirits from this, which are only to be seen, and wish only to dazzle others' eyes with admiration, not caring for unknown riches! But those yet more, which desire to seem above themselves, whether in parts or graces, whose veil is fairer than their skin. Modest faces shall shine through their veils, when the vain-glorious shall bewray their shame through their covering.

That God which gave his law in smoke, delivered it again through the veil of Moses. Israel could not look to the end of that which should be abolished; for the same cause had God a veil upon his face, which hid his presence in the holy of holies. Now, as the veil of God did rend when he said, "It is finished;" so the veil of Moses was then pulled off. We clearly see Christ the end of the law. Our Joshua, that succeeded Moses, speaks to us bare-faced. What a shame is it there should be a veil upon our hearts, when there is none on his face!

When Moses went to speak with God, he pulled off his veil: it was good reason he should present to God that face which he had made: there had been more need of his veil to hide the glorious face of God from him, than to hide his from God: but his faith and thankfulness serve for both these uses. Hypocrites are contrary to Moses; he showed his worst to men, his best to God; they show their best to men, their worst to God; but God sees both their veil and their face; and I know not whether he more hates their veil of dissimulation, or their face of wickedness.

CONTEMPLATION II.—OF NADAB AND ABIHU.

THAT God, which showed himself to men in fire when he delivered his law, would have men present their sacrifices to him in fire; and this fire he would have his own, that there might be a just circulation in this creature; as the water sends up those vapours which it receives down again in rain. Hereupon it was, that fire came down from God unto the altar; that as the charge of the sacrifice was delivered in fire and smoke, so God might signify the acceptation of it, in the like fashion wherein it was commanded. The Baalites might lay ready their bullock upon the wood, and water in their trench; but they might sooner fetch the blood out of their bodies, and destroy themselves, than one flash out of heaven to consume the sacrifice.

That devil, which can fetch down fire from heaven, either maliciously or to no purpose, (although he abound with fire, and did as fervently desire this fire, in emulation to God, as ever he desired mitigation of his own,) yet now he could no more kindle a fire for the idolatrous sacrifice, than quench the flames of his own torment. Herein God approves himself only worthy to be sacrificed unto, that he creates the fire for his own service; whereas the impotent idols of the heathen must fetch fire from their neighbour's kitchen, and themselves are fit matter for their borrowed fire.

The Israelites, that were led too much with sense, if they had seen the bullock consumed with a fire fetched from a common hearth, could never have acknowledged what relation the sacrifice had to God; had never perceived that God took notice of the sacrifice: but now they see the fire coming out from the presence of God, they are convinced both of the power and acceptation of the Almighty; they are at once amazed and satisfied to see the same God answer by fire, which before had spoken by fire. God doth not less approve our evangelical sacrifices than theirs under the law: but as our sacrifices are spiritual, so are the signs of his acceptation. Faith is our guide, as sense was theirs. Yea, even still doth God testify his approbation by sensible evidences. When by a lively faith and fervent zeal our hearts are consecrated to God, then doth this heavenly fire come down upon our sacrifices: then are they holy, living, acceptable.

This flame that God kindled, was not as some momentary bonfire, for a sudden and short triumph, nor as a domestic fire, to go out with the day; but is given for a perpetuity, and neither must die nor be quenched. God, as he is himself eternal, so he loves permanency and constancy of grace in us: if we be but a flash and away, God regards us not. All promises are to perseverance. Sure, it is but an elementary fire that goes out,—that which is celestial continues. It was but some presumptuous heat in us that decays upon every occasion.

But he that miraculously sent down this fire at first, will not renew the miracle every day by a like supply; it began immediately from God, it must be nourished by means. Fuel must maintain that fire which came from heaven; God will not work miracles every day: if he hath kindled his Spirit in us, we may not expect he shall every day begin again: we have the fuel of the word and sacraments, prayers and meditations, which must keep it in for ever. It is from God that these helps can nourish his graces in us, like as every flame of our material fire hath a concourse of providence; but we may not expect new infusions: rather know, that God expects of us an improvement of those habitual graces we have received.

While the people, with fear and joy, see God lighting his own fire, fire from heaven, the two sons of Aaron, in a careless presumption, will be serving him with a common flame; as if he might not have leave to choose the forms of his own worship. If this had been done some ages after, when the memory of the original of this heavenly fire had been worn out, it might have been excused with ignorance; but now, when God had newly sent his fire from above, newly commanded the continuance of it, either to let it go out, or, while it still flamed, to fetch profane coals to God's altar, could savour of no less than presumption and sacrilege. When we bring zeal without knowledge, misconceits of faith, carnal affections, the devices of our will-worship, superstitious devotions into God's service, we bring common fire to his altar; these flames were never of his kindling; he hates both altar, fire, priest, and sacrifice. And now, behold, the same fire, which consumed the sacrifice before, consumes the sacrificers. It was the sign of his acceptation, in consuming the beast, but, while it destroyed men, the fearful sign of his displeasure. By the same means can God bewray both love and hatred. We would have pleaded for Nadab and Abihu; they are but young men, the sons of

Aaron, not yet warm in their function; let both age, and blood, and inexperience excuse them as yet. No pretences, no privileges can bear off a sin with God. Men think either to patronise or mitigate evils, by their feigned reasons. That no man hope the plea either of birth, or of youth, or of the first commission of evil, may challenge pardon; I see here young men, sons of the ruler of Israel, for the first offence struck dead.

Yea, this made God the more to stomach, and the rather to revenge this impiety, because the sons of Aaron did it. God hath both pardoned and graced their father; he had honoured them, of the thousands of Israel, culling them out of his altar; and now, as their father set up a false god, so they bring false fire unto the true God.

If the sons of infidels live godlessly, they do their kind; their punishment shall be (though just) yet less; but if the children of religious parents, after all Christian nurture, shall shame their education, God takes it more heinously, and revenges it more sharply. The more bonds of duty, the more plagues of neglect.

If, from the agents, we look to the act itself; set aside the original descent, and what difference was there betwixt these fires? Both looked alike, heated alike, ascended alike, consumed alike; both were fed with the same material wood; both vanished into smoke; there was no difference, but in the commandment of God.

If God had enjoined ordinary fire, they had sinned to look for celestial. Now he commanded only the fire which he sent; they sinned in sending up incense in that fire which he commanded not It is a dangerous thing, in the service of God, to decline from his own institutions. We have to do with a power which is wise to prescribe his own worship, just to require what he hath prescribed, powerful to revenge that which he hath not required.

If God had struck them with some leprosy in their forehead, as he did their aunt Miriam, soon after, or with some palsy, or lingering consumption, the punishment had been grievous. But he, whose judgments are ever just, sometimes secret, saw fire the fittest revenge for a sin of fire; his own fire fittest to punish strange fire; a sudden judgment fit for a present and exemplary sin: he saw, that if he had winked at this, his service had been exposed to profanation.

It is wisdom in governors to take sin at the first bound, and so to revenge it, that their punishments may be preventions. Speed of death is not always a judgment: suddenness, as it is ever justly suspicable, so then certainly argues anger, when it finds us in an act of sin. Leisure of repentance is an argument of favour. When God gives a man law, it implies that he would not have judgment surprise him.

Doubtless, Aaron looked somewhat heavily on this sad spectacle: it could not but appal him to see his two sons dead before him, dead in displeasure, dead suddenly, dead by the immediate hand of God. And now he could repent him of his new honour to see it succeed so ill with the sons of his loins; neither could he choose but see himself stricken in them. But his brother Moses, that had learned not to know either nephews or brother, when they stood in his way to God, wisely turned his eyes from the dead carcasses of his sons, to his respect of the living God. My brother, this event is fearful, but just; these were thy sons, but they sinned; it was not for God, it is not for thee, to look so much who they were, as what they did. It was their honour and thine, that they were chosen to minister before the Lord. He that called them, justly required their sanctification and obedience. If they have profaned God and themselves, can thy natural affection so miscarry thee, that thou couldst wish their impunity, with the blemish of thy Maker? Our sons are not ours, if they disobey our Father: to pity their misery is to partake of their sin. If thou grudge at their judgment, take heed lest the same fire of God come forth upon this strange fire of nature. Show now whether thou more lovest God, or thy sons. Show whether thou be a better father, or a son.

Aaron, weighing these things, holds his peace, not out of an amazement or sullenness, but out of patient and humble submission; and seeing God's pleasure, and their desert, is content to forget that he had sons. He might have had a silent tongue, and a clamorous heart. There is no voice louder in the ears of God, than a speechless repining of the soul. Heat is more intended with keeping in; but Aaron's silence was no less inward: he knew how little he should get by brawling with God. If he breathed out discontentment, he saw God could speak fire to him again; and therefore he quietly submits to the will of God, and held his peace, because the Lord had done it. There is no greater proof of grace, than to smart patiently, and humbly and contentedly to rest the heart in the justice and wisdom of God's proceeding; and to be so far from chiding, that we dispute not. Nature is froward; and though she well knows we meddle not with our match, when we strive with our Maker, yet she pricks us forward to this idle quarrel; and bids us, with Job's wife, curse and die. If God either chide or smite, as servants are charged to their masters, we may not answer again; when God's hand is on our back, our hand must be on our mouth; else, as mothers do their children, God shall whip us so much the more for crying.

It is hard for a stander-by, in this case, to distinguish betwixt hardheartedness and pity. There Aaron sees his sons lie; he may neither put his hand to them to bury them, nor shed a tear for their death. Never parent can have juster cause of mourning, than to see his sons dead in their sin; if prepared and penitent, yet who can but sorrow for their end! But to part with children, to the danger of a second death, is worthy of more than tears. Yet Aaron must learn so far to deny nature, that he must more magnify the justice of God, than lament the judgment. Those whom God hath called to his immediate service, must know that he will not allow them the common passions and cares of others. Nothing is more natural than sorrow for the death of our own: if ever grief be seasonable, it becomes a funeral. And if Nadab and Abihu had died in their beds, this favour had been allowed them, the sorrow of their father and brethren: for when God forbids solemn mourning to his priests over the dead, he excepts the cases of this nearness of blood. Now all Israel may mourn for these two; only the father and brethren may not. God is jealous, lest their sorrow should seem to countenance the sin which he had punished; even the fearfullest acts of God must be applauded by the heaviest hearts of the faithful.

That which the father and brother may not do, the cousins are commanded. Dead carcasses are not for the presence of God; his justice was shown sufficiently in killing them; they are now fit for the grave, not the sanctuary; neither are they carried out naked, but in their coats. It was an unusual sight for Israel to see a linen ephod upon the bier; the judgment was so much the more remarkable, because they had the badge of their calling upon their backs.

Nothing is either more pleasing unto God, or more commodious to men, than that, when he hath executed judgment, it should be seen and wondered at; for therefore he strikes some, that he may warn all.

CONTEMPLATION III.—OF AARON AND MIRIAM.

The Israelites are stayed seven days in the station of Hasseroth, for the punishment of Miriam. The sins of the governors are a just stop to the people; all of them smart in one; all must stay the leisure of Miriam's recovery. Whosoever seeks the land of promise, shall find many lets; Amalek, Og, Sihon, and the kings of Canaan meet with Israel; these resisted, but hindered not their passage; their sins only stay them from removing. Afflictions are not crosses to us in the way to heaven, in comparison to our sins.

What is this I see? Is not this Aaron, that was brother in nature, and by office joint-commissioner with Moses? Is not this Aaron, that made his brother an intercessor for him to God, in the case of his idolatry? Is not this Aaron that climbed up the hill of Sinai with Moses? Is not this Aaron whom the mouth and hand of Moses consecrated a high-priest unto God? Is not this Miriam, the elder sister of Moses? Is not this Miriam, that led the triumph of the women, and sung gloriously to the Lord? Is not this Miriam, which laid her brother Moses in the reeds, and fetched her mother to be his nurse? Both prophets of God; both the flesh and blood of Moses. And doth this Aaron repine at the honour of him, that gave himself that honour, and saved his life? Doth this Miriam repine at the prosperity of him whose life she saved? Who would not have thought this should have been their glory, to have seen the glory of their own brother? What could have been a greater comfort to Miriam, than to think, how happily doth he now sit at the stern of Israel, whom I saved from perishing in a boat of bulrushes? It is to me that Israel owes this commander; but now envy hath so blinded their eyes, that they can neither see this privilege of nature, nor the honour of God's choice. Miriam and Aaron are in mutiny against Moses. Who is so holy that sins not? What sin is so unnatural, that the best can avoid without God? But what weakness soever may plead for Miriam, who can but grieve to see Aaron at the end of so many sins? Of late I saw him carving the molten image, and consecrating an altar to a false god. Now I see him seconding an unkind mutiny against his brother: both sins find him accessary; neither principal. It was not in the power of the legal priesthood to perform, or promise innocency to her ministers. It was necessary we should have another high-priest which could not be tainted. That King of righteousness was of another order; he being without sin, hath fully satisfied for the sins of men. Whom can it now offend, to see the blemishes of the evangelical priesthood, when God's first high-priest is thus miscarried?

Who can look for love and prosperity at once, when holy and meek Moses finds enmity in his own flesh and blood? Rather than we shall want, "A man's enemies shall be those of his own house." Authority cannot fail of opposition, if it be never so mildly swayed: that common make-bate will rather raise it out of our own bosom. To do well, and hear ill, is princely.

The Midianitish wife of Moses cost him dear. Before, she hazarded his life; now, the favour of his people. Unequal matches are seldom prosperous. Although now this scandal was only taken; envy was not wise enough to choose a ground of the quarrel. Whether some secret and emulatory brawls passed between Zipporah and Miriam, (as many times these sparks of private brawls grow into a perilous and common flame) or whether, now that Jethro and his family was joined with Israel, there were surmises of transporting the government to strangers; or whether this unfit choice of Moses is now raised up to disparage God's gifts in him; even in sight, the exceptions were frivolous. Emulation is curious, and, out of the best person, or act, will raise something to cavil at.

Seditions do not ever look the same way they move. Wise men can easily distinguish betwixt the vizor of actions, and the face. The wife of Moses is mentioned, his superiority is shot at. Pride is lightly the ground of all sedition. Which of their faces shined like Moses? Yea, let him but have drawn his veil, which of them durst look on his face? Which of them had fasted twice forty days? Which of them ascended up to the top of Sinai, and was hid with smoke and fire? Which of them received the law twice in two several tables, from God's own hand? And yet they dare say, "Hath God spoken only by Moses?" They do not deny Moses his honour, but they challenge a part with him; and as they were the elder in nature, so they would be equal in dignity, equal in administration. According to her name, Miriam would be exalted. And yet how unfit were they! One a woman, whom her sex debarred from rule; the other a priest, whom his office sequestered from earthly government. Self-love makes men unreasonable, and teaches them to turn the glass, to see themselves bigger, others less than they are. It is a hard thing for a man, willingly and gladly to see his equals lifted over his head, in worth and opinion. Nothing will more try a man's grace, than questions of emulation. That man hath true light, which can be content to be a candle before the sun of others.

As no wrong can escape God, so, least of all, those which are offered to princes. He that made the ear, needs no intelligence of our tongues. We have to do with a God, that is light of hearing; we cannot whisper any evil so secretly, that he should not cry out of noise: and what need we any further evidence, when our judge is our witness?

Without any delation of Moses, God hears and challenges them. Because he was meek, therefore he complained not: because he was meek and complained not, therefore the Lord struck in for him the more. The less a man strives for himself, the more is God his champion. It is the honour of great persons to undertake the patronage of their clients: how much more will God revenge his elect, which cry to him day and night! He that said, "I seek not mine own glory," adds, "But there is one that seeks it, and judges." God takes his part ever, that fights not for himself.

No man could have given more proofs of his courage than Moses, He slew the Egyptian; he confronted Pharaoh in his own court; he beat the Midianite shepherds; he feared not the troops of Egypt; he durst look God in the face amidst all the terrors of Sinai; and yet that Spirit which made and knew his heart, says, "He was the mildest man upon earth." Mildness and fortitude may well lodge together in one breast; to correct the misconceits of those men, that think none valiant, but those that are fierce and cruel.

No sooner is the word out of Miriam's mouth, than the word of God's reproof meets it. How he bestirs him, and will be at once seen and heard, when the name of Moses is in question! Moses was zealously careful for God's glory, and now God is zealous for his. The remunerations of the Almighty are infinitely gracious. He cannot want honour and patronage, that seeks the honour of his Maker. The ready way to true glory is goodness.

God might have spoken so loud, that heaven and earth should have heard it, so as they should not have needed to come forth for audience; but now, he calls them out to the bar, that they may be seen to hear. It did not content him to chide them within doors; the shame of their fault had been less in a private rebuke; but the scandal of their repining was public. Where the sin is not afraid of the light, God loves not the reproof should be smothered.

They had depressed Moses, God advances him. They had equalled themselves to Moses, God prefers him to them. Their plea was, that God had spoken by them, as well as by Moses. God's reply is, That he hath, in a more entire fashion, spoken to Moses, than them. God spake to the best of them, but either in their dream, sleeping, or in vision, waking; but to Moses he spake with more inward illumination, with more lively representation; to others, as a stranger; to Moses, as a friend. God had never so much magnified Moses to them, but for their envy. We cannot devise to pleasure God's servants so much as by despiting them.

God was angry when he chid them, but more angry when he departed. The withdrawing of his presence, is the presence of his wrath. While he stays to reprove, there is favour in his displeasure: but when he leaves either man or church, there is no hope but of vengeance. The final absence of God, is hell itself. When he forsakes us, though for a time, it is an introduction to his utmost judgment. It was time to look for a judgment when God departed: so soon as he is gone from the eyes of Miriam, the leprosy appears in her face: her foul tongue is punished with a foul face. Since she would acknowledge no difference betwixt herself, and her brother Moses, every Israelite now sees his face glorious, her's leprous. Deformity is a fit cure of pride. Because the venom of her tongue would have eaten into the reputation of her brother; therefore a poisonous infection eats into her flesh. Now both Moses and Miriam need to wear a veil, the one to hide his glory, the other her deformity. That Midianite Zipporah, whom she scorned, was beautiful in respect of her.

Miriam was stricken, Aaron escaped, both sinned; his priesthood could not rescue him; the greatness of his dignity did but add to the heinousness of his sin; his repentance freed him. Alas, my Lord, I beseech thee, lay not this sin upon us, which we have foolishly committed! I wonder not to see Aaron free, while I see him penitent; this very confession saved him before from bleeding for idolatry, which now preserves him from leprosy, for his envious repining. The universal antidote for all the judgments of God, is our humble repentance.

Yea, his sad deprecation prevailed, both to clear himself, and recover Miriam. The brother sues for himself and his sister, to that brother whom they both emulated, for pardon from himself, and that God which was offended in him. Where now is that equality which was pretended? Behold, he that so lately made his brother his fellow, now makes him his god. "Lay not this sin upon us; let her not be as one dead;" as if Moses had imposed this plague, and could remove it. Never any opposed the servants of God, but, one time or other, they have been constrained to confess a superiority.

Miriam would have wounded Moses with her tongue, Moses would heal her with his; "O Lord, heal her now." The wrong is the greater, because his sister did it. He doth not say, I sought not her shame, she sought mine; if God have revenged it, I have no reason to look on her as a sister, who looked at me as an adversary: but, as if her leprosy were his, he cries out for her cure. O admirable meekness of Moses! His people the Jews rebelled against him: God proffers revenge: he would rather die, than they should perish. His sister rebelled against him, God works his revenge: he will not give God peace till she be recured. Behold a worthy and noble pattern for us to follow! How far are they from this disposition, who are not only content God should revenge, but are ready to prevent God's revenge with their own!

God's love to Moses suffers him not to obtain presently his suit for Miriam; his good nature to his sister made him pray against himself. If the judgment had been at once inflicted, and removed, there had been no example of terror for others. God either denies, or defers the grant of our requests for our good. It were wide for us, if our suits should be ever heard. It was fit for all parts, Miriam should continue some while leprous. There is no policy in a sudden removal of just punishment: unless the rain so fall, that it lie and soak into the earth, it profits nothing. If the judgments of God should be only as passengers, and not sojourners at least, they would be no whit regarded.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—THE SEARCHERS OF CANAAN.

I CAN but wonder at the counsel of God. If the Israelites had gone on to Canaan, without inquiry, their confidence had possessed it. Now they send to espy the land; six hundred thousand never lived to see it: and yet I see God enjoining them to send: but enjoining it upon their instance. Some things God allows in judgment; their importunity and distrust extorted from God this occasion of their overthrow. That which the Lord moves unto, prospers; but that which we move him to first, seldom succeedeth. What needed they doubt of the goodness of that land, which God told them did flow with milk and honey? What needed they doubt of obtaining that which God promised to give? When we will send forth our senses to be our scouts in the matters of faith, and rather dare trust men than God, we are worthy to be deceived.

The basest sort of men are commonly held fit enough for intelligencers; but Moses, to make sure work, chooseth forth the best of Israel, such as were like to be most judicious in their inquiry, and most credible in their report. Those that ruled Israel at home, could best descry for them abroad. What should direct the body but the head? Men can judge but by appearance; it is for him only that sees the event, ere he appoint the means, not to be deceived. It had been better for Israel to have sent the offal of the multitude; by how much less the credit of their person is, by so much less is the danger of seducement. The error of the mighty is armed with authority, and in a sort commands assent: whether in good or evil, greatness hath ever a train to follow it at the heels.

Forty days they spent in this search; and this cowardly unbelief in the search shall cost them forty years' delay of the fruition. Who can abide to see the rulers of Israel so basely timorous? They commend the land, the fruit commends itself, and yet they plead difficulty; "We be not able to go up." Their shoulders are laden with the grapes, and yet their hearts are overlaid with unbelief. It is an unworthy thing to plead hardness of achieving, where the benefit will more than requite the endeavour. Our land of promise is above; we know, the fruit thereof is sweet and glorious, the passage difficult. The giantly sons of Anak (the powers of darkness) stand in our way. If we sit down and complain, we shall once know, that "without shall be the fearful."

See the idle pleas of distrust; "We are not able; They are stronger." Could not God enable them? Was he not stronger than their giants? Had he not promised to displace the Canaanites, to settle them in their stead? How much more easy is it for us to spy their weakness, than for them to espy the strength of their adversaries! When we measure our spiritual success by our own power, we are vanquished before we fight. He that would overcome, must neither look upon his own arm, nor the arm of his enemy, but the mouth and hand of him that hath promised, and can perform. Who are we, flesh and blood, with our breath in our nostrils, that we should fight with principalities, powers, spiritual wickednesses in heavenly places? The match is too unequal; we are like grasshoppers to these giants; when we compare ourselves with them, how can we but despair? When we compare them with God, how can we be discouraged? He that hath brought us into this field, hath promised us victory. God knew their strength, ere he offered to commit us.

Well might they have thought, were not the Amalekites stronger than we? Were not they armed, we naked? Did not the only hand of Moses, by lifting up, beat them down? Were not the Egyptians no less our masters? Did not death come running after us in their chariots? Did we not leave these buried in the sea, the other unburied in the wilderness? Whence had the Anakims their strength, but from him that bids us go up against them? Why have the bodies of our forefathers taken possession of their Hebron, but for us? But now, their fear hath not left them so much reason as to compare their adversaries with others, but only with themselves: doubtless, these giants were mighty, but their fear hath stretched them out some cubits beyond their stature. Distrust makes our dangers greater, and our helps less than they are, and forecasts ever worse than shall be; and if evils be possible, it makes them certain.

Amongst those twelve messengers whom our second Moses sent through the land of promise, there was but one Judas; but, amongst those twelve which the former Moses addressed through the same land, there is but one Caleb: and yet those were chosen out of the meanest; these, out of the heads of Israel. As there is no society free from some corruption, so it is hard if in a community of men there be not some faithfulness.

We shall wrong God, if we fear lest good causes shall be quite forsaken. He knows how to serve himself of the best, if the fewest; and could as easily be attended with a multitude, if he did not seek his own glory in unlikelihoods.

Joshua was silent, and wisely spared his tongue for a further advantage; only Caleb spake. I do not hear him say, Who am I to strive with a multitude? What can Joshua and I do against ten rulers? It is better to sit still than to rise and fall: but he resolves to swim against this stream, and will either draw friends to the truth, or enemies upon himself.

True Christian fortitude teaches us not to regard the number or quality of the opponents, but the equity of the cause, and cares not to stand alone, and challenge all comers; and if it could be opposed by as many worlds as men, it may be overborne, but it cannot be daunted: whereas popularity carries weak minds, and teaches them the safety of erring with a multitude.

Caleb saw the giantly Anakims and the walled cities as well as the rest, and yet he says, "Let us go up and possess it;" as if it were no more but to go, and see, and conquer. Faith is courageous, and makes nothing of those dangers wherewith others are quelled.

It is very material with what eyes we look upon all objects. Fear doth not more multiply evils, than faith diminisheth them; which is therefore bold, because either it sees not, or contemns that terror which fear represents to the weak. There is none so valiant as the believer.

It had been happy for Israel if Caleb's counsel had been as effectual as good: but how easily have these rulers discouraged a faint-hearted people! Instead of lifting up their ensigns, and marching towards Canaan, they sit them down, and lift up their voice and cry. The rods of their Egyptian task-masters had never been so fit for them, as now, for crying. They had cause, indeed, to weep for the sin of their infidelity; but now they weep for fear of those enemies they saw not. I fear, if there had been ten Calebs to persuade, and but two faint spies to discourage them, those two cowards would have prevailed against those ten solicitors: how much more, now ten oppose and but two encourage! An easy rhetoric draws us to the worse part; yea, it is hard not to run down the hill. The faction of evil is so much stronger in our nature than that of good, that every least motion prevails for the one, scarce any suit for the other.

Now is Moses in danger of losing all the cost and care that ever he bestowed upon Israel: his people are already gone back to Egypt in their hearts, and their bodies are returning. Oh! ye rebellious Hebrews, where shall God have you at last! Did ever Moses promise to bring you to a fruitful land, without inhabitants,—to give you a rich country, without resistance? Are not the graves of Canaan as good as those of

Egypt? What, can ye but die at the hands of the Anakims? Can ye hope for less from the Egyptians? What madness is this to wish to die, for fear of death? Is there less hope from your enemies that shall be, when ye go under strong and expert leaders, than from the enemies that were, when ye shall return masterless? Can those cruel Egyptians so soon have forgotten the blood of their fathers, children, brothers, husbands, which perished in pursuing you? Had ye rather trust the mercy of known enemies, than the promise of a faithful God? Which way will ye return? Who shall divide the sea for you? Who shall fetch you water out of the rock? Or can ye hope, that the manna of God will follow you while ye run from him? Feeble minds, when they meet with crosses they looked not for, repent of their good beginnings, and wish any difficulty rather than that they find. How many have pulled back their foot from the narrow way, for the troubles of a good profession!

It had been time for the Israelites to have fallen down on their faces before Moses and Aaron, and to have said, Ye led us through the sea, make way for us into Canaan. Those giants are strong, but not so strong as the rock of Rephidim; ye struck that, and it yielded: if they be tall, the pillar of God is higher than they: when we look on ourselves, we see cause of fear; but when we consider the miraculous power of you our leaders, we cannot but contemn those men of measures. Leave us not, therefore, but go before us in your directions; go to God for us in your prayers. But now contrarily, Moses and Aaron fall on their faces to them, and sue to them that they would be content to be conducted. Had they been suffered to depart, they had perished; Moses and his few had been victorious: and yet, as if he could not be happy without them, he falls on his face to them, that they would stay. We have never so much need to be importuned, as in those things whose benefit should make us most importunate. The sweetness of God's law, and our promised glory, is such as should draw all hearts after it; and yet, if we did not sue to men, as for life, that they would be reconciled to God, and be saved, I doubt whether they would obey; yea, it were well if our suit were sufficient to prevail.

Though Moses and Aaron entreat upon their faces, and Joshua and Caleb persuade, and rend their garments, yet they move nothing. The obstinate multitude, grown more violent with opposing, is ready to return them stones for their prayers. Such hath been ever the thanks of fidelity and truth. Crossed wickedness proves desperate, and, instead of yielding, seeks for revenge. Nothing is so hateful to a resolute sinner as good counsel. We are become enemies to the world, because we tell them truth.

That God, which was invisibly present while they sinned, when they have sinned, shows himself glorious. They might have seen him before, that they should not sin; now they cannot choose but see him in the height of their sin. They saw before the pillar of his ordinary presence; now, they see him unusually terrible, that they may, with shame and horror, confess him able to defend, able to revenge. The help of God uses to show itself in extremity. He that can prevent evils, conceals his aid till danger be ripe; and then he is as fearful as before he seemed connivent.

CONTEMPLATION V.—KORAH'S CONSPIRACY.

The tears of Israel were scarce dry since the smart of their last mutiny, and now they begin another. The multitude is like a raging sea, full of unquiet billows of discontentment, whereof one rises in the fall of another. They saw God did but threaten, and therefore are they bold to sin. It was now high time they should know what it is for God to be angry. There was never such a revenge taken of Israel; never any better deserved. When lesser warnings will not serve, God looks into his quiver for deadly arrows. In the meantime, what a weary life did Moses lead in these continual successions of conspiracies! What did he gain by this troublesome government, but danger and despite? Who but he would not have wished himself rather with the sheep of Jethro, than with these wolves of Israel? But, as he durst not quit his hook without the calling of God, so now he dare not his sceptre, except he be dismissed of him that called him; no troubles, no oppositions can drive him from his place: we are too weak if we suffer men to chase us from that station where God hath set us.

I see the Levites, not long since, drawing their swords, for God and Moses, against the rest of Israel; and that fact wins them both praise and blessing. Now they are the forwardest in the rebellion against Moses and Aaron, men of their own tribe. There is no assurance of a man for one act; whom one sin cannot fasten upon, another may. Yea, the same sin may find a repulse one while from the same hand, which another time gives it entertainment; and that yieldance loses the thank of all the former resistance. It is no praise to have done once well, unless we continue.

Outward privileges of blood can avail nothing against a particular calling of God. These Reubenites had the right of the natural primogeniture, yet do they vainly challenge pre-eminence, where God hath subjected them. If all civil honour flow from the king, how much more from the God of kings? His hand exalts the poor, and casts down the mighty from their throne. The man that will be lifting up himself in the pride of his heart, from under the foot of God, is justly trodden in the dust.

Moses is the prince of Israel, Aaron the priest; Moses was mild, Aaron popular; yet both are conspired against. Their places are no less brothers, than their persons. Both are opposed at once. He that is a traitor to the church, is a traitor to the king. Any superiority is a mark of envy. Had Moses and Aaron been but fellows with the Israelites, none had been better beloved; their dispositions were such, as must needs have forced favour from the indifferent: now they were advanced, their malice is not inferior to their honour. High towers must look for lightnings. We offer not to undermine but those walls which we cannot scale. Nature, in every man, is both envious and disdainful, and never loves to honour another, but where it may be an honour to itself.

There cannot be conceived an honour less worthy of emulation, than this principality of Israel; a people that could give nothing; a people that had nothing, but in hope; a people whom their leader was fain to feed with bread and water, which paid him no tribute but of ill words; whose command was nothing but a burden; and yet this dignity was an eye-sore to these Levites, and these Reubenites; "Ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi."

And this challenge, though thus unseasonable, hath drawn in two hundred and fifty captains of Israel. What wonder is it, that the ten rulers prevailed so much with the multitude to dissuade them from Canaan; when three traitors prevailed thus with two hundred and fifty rulers, famous in the congregation, and men of renown? One man may kindle such a fire, as all the world cannot quench. One plague-sore may infect a whole kingdom: the infection of evil is much worse than the act.

It is not like these leaders of Israel could err without followers. He is a mean man that draws not some clients after him. It hath been ever a dangerous policy of Satan to assault the best; he knows that the multitude, as we say of bees, will follow their master.

Nothing can be more pleasing to the vulgar sort, than to hear their governors taxed, and themselves flattered. "All the congregation is holy; every one of them; whereof lift ye up yourselves?" Every word is a falsehood. For Moses dejected himself; "Who am I?" God lifted him up over Israel; and so was Israel holy, as Moses was ambitious. What holiness was there in so much infidelity, fear, idolatry, mutiny, disobedience? What could make them unclean, if this were holiness? They had scarce wiped their mouths, or washed their hands, since their last obstinacy; and yet these pick-thanks say, "All Israel is holy."

I would never desire a better proof of a false teacher than flattery. True meaning need not uphold itself by soothing. There is nothing easier than to persuade men well of themselves; when a man's self-love meets with another's flattery, it is a high praise that will not be believed. It was more out of opposition than belief, that these men plead the holiness of Israel. Violent adversaries, to uphold a side, will maintain those things they believe not.

Moses argues not for himself, but appeals to God; neither speaks for his own right, but his brother Aaron's. He knew that God's immediate service was worthy to be more precious than his government: that his princedom served but to the glory of his master. Good magistrates are more tender over God's honour than their own; and more sensible of the wrongs offered to religion, than to themselves.

It is safest to trust God with his own causes. If Aaron had been chosen by Israel, Moses would have sheltered him under their authority. Now that God did immediately appoint him, his patronage is sought, whose the election was. We may easily fault in the managing of divine affairs; and so our want of success cannot want sin; he knows how to use, how to bless his own means.

As there was a difference betwixt the people and Levites, so betwixt the Levites and priests. The God of order loves to have our decrees kept. While the Levites would be looking up to the priests, Moses sends down their eyes to the people. The way not to repine at those above us, is to look at those below us. There is no better remedy for ambition, than to cast up our former receipts, and to compare them with our deservings, and to confer our own estate with inferiors, so shall we find cause to be thankful that we are above any, rather than of envy that any is above us.

Moses hath chid the sons of Levi for mutinying against Aaron; and so much the more, because they were of his own tribe. Now he sends for the Reubenites, who rose against himself. They come not, and their message is worse than their absence. Moses is accused of injustice, cruelty, falsehood, treachery, usurpation; and Egypt itself must be commended rather than Moses shall want reproach. Innocency is no shelter from ill tongues; malice never regards how true any accusation is, but how spiteful.

Now it was time for Moses to be angry. They durst not have been thus bold if they had not seen his mildness. Lenity is ill bestowed upon stubborn natures; it is an injurious senselessness, not to feel the wounds of our reputation. It well appears he is angry, when he prays against them. He was displeased before; but, when he was most bitter against them, he still prayed for them; but now, he bends his very prayers against them. "Look not to their offering." There can be no greater revenge than the imprecation of the righteous: there can be no greater judgment, than God's rejection of their services. With us men, what more argues dislike of the person, than the turning back of his present? What will God accept from us, if not prayers?

The innocence of Moses calls for revenge on his adversaries. If he had wronged them in his government, in vain should he have looked to God's hand for right. Our sins exclude us from God's protection; whereas uprightness challenges, and finds his patronage. An ass taken, had made him incapable of favour. Corrupt governors lose the comfort of their own breast, and the tuition of God.

The same tongue that prayed against the conspirators, prays for the people. As lewd men think to carry it with number, Korah had so far prevailed, that he had drawn the multitude to his side. God, the avenger of treasons, would have consumed them all at once. Moses and Aaron pray for these rebels. Although they were worthy of death, and nothing but death could stop their mouths, yet their merciful leaders will not buy their own peace with the loss of such enemies. Oh rare and inimitable mercy! The people rise up against their governors; their governors fall on their faces to God for the people; so far are they from plotting revenge, that they will not endure God should revenge for them.

Moses knew well enough, that all those Israelites must perish in the wilderness; God had vowed it, for their former insurrection; yet how earnestly doth he sue to God, not to consume them at once! The very respite of evils is a favour next to the removal.

Korah kindled the fire, the two hundred and fifty captains brought sticks to it; all Israel warmed themselves by it; only the incendiaries perish. Now do the Israelites owe their life to them whose death they intended. God and Moses knew to distinguish betwixt the heads of the faction and the train; though neither be faultless, yet the one is plagued, the other forgiven. God's vengeance, when it is at the hottest, makes differences of men. "Get you away from about the tabernacles of Korah." Ever before common judgment, there is a separation. In the universal judgment of all the earth, the Judge himself will separate; in these particular executions, we must separate ourselves. The society of wicked men, especially in their sins, is mortally dangerous; while we will not be parted, how can we complain if we be enwrapped in their condemnation? Our very company sins with them, why should we not smart with them also?

Moses had well hoped, that when these rebels should see all the Israelites run from them as from monsters, and looking affrightedly upon their tents, and should hear that fearful proclamation of vengeance against them (howsoever they did before set a face on their conspiracy; yet now) their hearts would have misgiven. But lo, these bold traitors stand impudently staring in the door of their tents, as if they would out-face the revenge of God; as if Moses had never wrought a miracle before them; as if no one Israelite had ever bled for rebelling. Those that shall perish are blinded. Pride and infidelity obdures the heart, and makes even cowards fearless.

So soon as the innocent are severed, the guilty perish; the earth cleaves and swallows up the rebels. This element was not used to such morsels. It devours the carcasses of men: but bodies informed with living souls, never before. To have seen them struck dead upon the earth had been fearful; but to see the earth at once their executioner and grave, was more horrible. Neither the sea nor the earth are fit to give passage; the sea is moist and flowing, and will not be divided, for the continuity of it; the earth is dry and massy, and will neither yield naturally, nor meet again when it hath yielded; yet the waters did cleave to give way unto Israel, for their preservation; the earth did cleave to give way to the conspirators in judgment: both sea and earth did shut their jaws again upon the adversaries of God.

There was more wonder in this latter. It was a marvel that the waters opened; it was no wonder that they shut again; for the retiring and flowing was natural. It was no less marvel that the earth opened; but more marvel that it shut again; because it had no natural disposition to meet, when it was divided. Now might Israel see, they had to do with a God that could revenge with ease.

There were two sorts of traitors; the earth swallowed up the one, the fire the other. All the elements agree to serve the vengeance of their Maker. Nadab and Abihu brought fit persons, but unfit fire to God; these Levites bring the right fire, but unwarranted persons before him; fire from God consumes both. It is a dangerous thing to usurp sacred functions. The ministry will not grace the man; the man may disgrace the ministry.

The common people were not so fast gathered to Korah's flattering persuasion before, as now they ran from the sight and fear of his judgment. I marvel not if they could not trust that earth whereon they stood, while they knew their hearts had been false. It is a madness to run away from punishment, and not from sin.

BOOK VII.

CONTEMPLATION I.—AARON'S CENSER AND ROD.

When shall we see an end of these murmurings, and these judgments? Because these men rose up against Moses and Aaron, therefore God consumed them; and because God consumed them, therefore the people rise up against Moses and Aaron: and now, because the people thus murmur, God hath again begun to consume them. What a circle is here of sins and judgments! Wrath is gone out from God; Moses is quick-sighted, and spies it at the setting out. By how much more faithful and familiar we are with God, so much earlier do we discern his judgments; as those which are well acquainted with men, know, by their looks and gestures, that which strangers understand but by their actions as finer tempers are more sensible of the changes of weather: hence the seers of God have ever, from their watch-tower, descried the judgments of God afar off. If another man had seen from Carmel a cloud of a hand-breadth, he could not have told Ahab he should be wet. It is enough for God's messengers, out of their acquaintance with their Master's proceedings, to foresee punishment: no marvel if those see it not, which are wilfully sinful. We men reveal not our secret purposes, either to enemies or strangers: all their favour is to feel the plague, ere they can espy it.

Moses, though he were great with God, yet he takes not upon him this reconciliation; he may advise Aaron what to do, himself undertakes not to act it. It is the work of the priesthood to make an atonement for the people; Aaron was first his brother's tongue to Pharaoh, now is he the people's tongue to God: he only must offer up the incense of the public prayers to God. Who would not think it a small thing to hold a censer in his hand? yet, if any other had done it, he had fallen with the dead, and not stood betwixt the living and the dead; instead of the smoke ascending, the fire had descended upon him: and shall there be less use, or less regard of the evangelical ministry, than the legal? When the world hath poured out all his contempt, we are they that must reconcile men to God, and without us they perish.

I know not whether more to marvel at the courage or mercy of Aaron; his mercy, that he would save so rebellious a people; his courage, that he would save them with so great a danger to himself. For, as one that would part a fray, he thrusts himself under the strokes of God, and puts it to the choice of the revenger, whether he will smite him, or forbear the rest; he stands boldly betwixt the living and the dead, as one that will either die with them, or have them live with him: the sight of fourteen hundred carcasses dismayed him not: he that before feared the threats of the people, now fears not the strokes of God. It is not for God's ministers to stand upon their own perils in the common causes of the church: their prayers must oppose the judgments of the Almighty; when the fire of God's anger is kindled, their censers must smoke with fire from the altar. Every Christian must pray the removal of vengeance; how much more they whom God hath appointed to mediate for his people; every man's mouth is his own; but they are mouths of all.

Had Aaron thrust in himself with empty hands, I doubt whether he had prevailed; now his censer was his protection. When we come with supplications in our hands, we need not fear the strokes of God. We have leave to resist the divine judgments by our prayers, with favour and success. So soon as the incense of Aaron ascended up to God, he smelt a savour of rest; he will rather spare the offenders, than strike their intercessor. How hardly can any people miscarry, that have faithful ministers to sue for their safety! Nothing but the smoke of hearty prayers can cleanse the air from the plagues of God.

If Aaron's sacrifice were thus accepted, how much more shall the High-Priest of the new testament, by interposing himself to the wrath of his Father, deliver the offenders from death? The plague was entered upon all the sons of men. O Saviour, thou stoodest betwixt the living and the dead, that all which believe in thee should not perish! Aaron offered and was not stricken; but thou, O Redeemer, wouldst offer and be struck, that by thy stripes we might be healed! So stoodest thou betwixt the dead and living, that thou wert both alive and dead; and all this, that we, when we were dead, might live for ever.

Nothing more troubled Israel, than a fear lest the two brethren should cunningly engross the government to themselves. If they had done so, what wise men would have envied them an office so little worth, so dearly purchased? But because this conceit was ever apt to stir them to rebellion, and to hinder the benefit of this holy sovereignty; therefore God hath endeavoured nothing more, than to let them see that these officers, whom they so much envied, were of his own proper institution. They had scarce shut their eyes since they saw the confusion of those two hundred and fifty usurping sacrificers; and Aaron's effectual intercession for staying the plague of Israel.

In the one, the execution of God's vengeance upon the competitors of Aaron, for his sake; in the other, the forbearance of vengeance upon the people for Aaron's mediation, might have challenged their voluntary acknowledgment of his just calling from God. If there had been in them either awe or thankfulness, they could not have doubted of his lawful supremacy. How could they choose but argue thus? Why would God so fearfully have destroyed the rivals that durst contest with Aaron, if he would have allowed him any equal? Wherefore serve those plates of the altar, which we see made of those usurped censers, but to warn all posterity of such presumption! Why should God cease striking, while Aaron interposed betwixt the living and the dead, if he were but as one of us? Which of us, if we had stood in the plague, had not added to the heap? Incredulous minds will not be persuaded with any evidence. These two brothers had lived asunder forty years; God makes them both meet in one office of delivering Israel. One half of the miracles were wrought by Aaron; he struck with the rod, while it brought those plagues on Egypt. The Israelites heard God call him up by name to Mount Sinai; they saw him anointed from God, and (lest they should think this a set match betwixt the brethren) they saw the earth opening, the fire issuing from God upon their emulous opposites: they saw his smoke, a sufficient antidote for the plague of God; and yet still Aaron's calling is questioned.

Nothing is more natural to every man than unbelief: but the earth never yielded a people so strongly incredulous as these; and, after so many thousand generations, their children do inherit their obstinacy; still do they oppose the true High Priest, the anointed of God. Sixteen hundred years' desolation hath not drawn from them to confess him whom God hath chosen.

How desirous was God to give satisfaction even to the obstinate! There is nothing more material, than that men should be assured their spiritual guides have their commission and calling from God: the want whereof is a prejudice to our success. It should not be so: but the corruption of men will not receive good, but from due messengers.

Before, God wrought miracles in the rod of Moses; now, in the rod of Aaron. As Pharaoh might see himself in Moses' rod, who, of a rod of defence and protection, was turned into a venomous serpent, so Israel might see themselves in the rod of Aaron. Every tribe, and every Israelite was, of himself, as a serestick, without life, without sap; and if any one of them had power to live, and flourish, he must acknowledge it from the immediate power and gift of God.

Before God's calling, all men are alike: every name is alike written in their rod; there is no difference in the letters, in the wood; neither the characters of Aaron are fairer, nor the staff more precious. It is the choice of God that makes the distinction; so it is in our calling of Christianity; all are equally devoid of possibility of grace; all equally lifeless; by nature we are all sons of wrath. If we be now better than others, who separated us? We are all crabstocks in this orchard of God, he may graff what fruit he pleases upon us; only the grace, and effectual calling of God, makes the difference.

These twelve heads of Israel would never have written their names in their rods, but in hope they might be chosen to this dignity. What an honour was this priesthood, whereof all the princes of Israel are ambitious! If they had not thought it a high preferment, they had never so much envied the office of Aaron. What shall we think of this change! Is the evangelical ministration of less worth than the Levitical? While the testament is better, is the service worse? How is it, that the great think themselves too good for this employment? How is it, that under the gospel, men are disparaged with that, which honoured them under the law; that their ambition and our scorn meet in one subject?

These twelve rods are not laid up in the several cabinets of their owners, but are brought forth and laid before the Lord. It is fit God should make choice of his own attendants. Even we men hold it injurious to have servants obtruded upon us by others. Never shall that man have comfort in his ministry, whom God hath not chosen. The great commander of the world hath set every man in his station; to one he hath said, Stand thou in this tower and watch; to another, Make thou good these trenches; to a third, Dig thou in this mine. He that gives, and knows our abilities, can best set us on work.

This road was the pastoral staff of Aaron, the great shepherd of Israel. God testifies his approbation of his charge, by the fruit. That a rod cut off from the tree should blossom, it was strange; but, that in one night it should bear buds, blossoms, fruit, and that both ripe and hard, it was highly miraculous. The same power that revives the dead plants of winter, in the spring, doth it here without earth, without time, without sun, that Israel might see and grant, it was no reason his choice should be limited, whose power is unlimited.

Fruitfulness is the best argument of the calling of God: not only all the plants of his setting, but the very boughs cut off from the body of them, will flourish. And that there may not want a succession of increase, here are fruit, blossoms, buds; both proof and hope, inseparably mixed.

It could not but be a great comfort unto Aaron, to see his rod thus miraculously flourishing; to see this wonderful testimony of God's favour and election: sure, he could not but think, who am I, O God, that thou shouldst thus choose me out of all the tribes of Israel? My weakness hath been more worthy of thy rod of correction, than my rod hath been worthy of these blossoms. How hast thou magnified me in the sight of all thy people! How able art thou to uphold my imbecility with the rod of thy support! How able to defend me with the rod of thy power, who hast thus brought fruit out of the sapless rod of my profession! That servant of God is worthy to faint, that holds it not a sufficient encouragement, to see the evident proofs of his master's favour.

Commonly, those fruits which are soon ripe, soon wither; but these almonds of Aaron's rod, are not more early than lasting; the same hand which brought them out before their time, preserved them beyond their time; and, for perpetual memory, both rod and fruit must be kept in the ark of God. The tables of Moses, the rod of Aaron, the manna of God, are monuments fit for so holy a shrine. The doctrine, sacraments, and government of God's people, are precious to him, and must be so to men. All times shall see and wonder, how his ancient church was fed, taught, ruled. Moses' rod did great miracles, yet I find it not in the ark. The rod of Aaron hath this privilege, because it carried the miracle still in itself; whereas the wonders of that other rod were passed. Those monuments would God have continued in his church, which carry in them the most manifest evidences of that which they import.

The same God, which by many transient demonstrations had approved the calling of Aaron to Israel, will now have a permanent memorial of their conviction; that, whensoever they should see this relict, they should be ashamed of their presumption and infidelity. The name of Aaron was not more plainly written in that rod, than the sin of Israel was in the fruit of it: and how much Israel finds their rebellion beaten with this rod, appears in their present relenting and complaint; "Behold, we are dead, we perish." God knows how to pull down the biggest stomach, and can extort glory to his own name, from the most obstinate gainsayers.

CONTEMPLATION II.—OF THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

SEVEN times already hath Israel mutinied against Moses, and seven times hath either been threatened or punished; yet now they fall to it afresh. As a testy man finds occasion to chaff at every trifle; so this discontented people either find, or make all things troublesome. One while they have no water, then bitter; one while no God, then one too many; one while no bread, then bread enough, but too light; one while they will not abide their governors, then they cannot abide their loss. Aaron and Miriam were never so grudged alive, as they are bewailed dead. Before, they wanted onions, garlic, flesh-pots; now, they want figs, vines, pomegranates, corn. And as crabbed children that cry for every thing they can think of, are whipped by their wise mother, so God justly serves these fond Israelites.

It was first their way that makes them repine: they were fain to go round about Idumea; the journey was long and troublesome. They had sent entreaties to Edom for license of passage next way, reasonably, submissly: it was churlishly denied them. Esau lives still in his posterity, Jacob in Israel. The combat, which they began in Rebecca's belly, is not yet ended. Amalek, which was one limb of Esau, follows them at the heels. The Edomite, which was another, meets them in the face. So long as there is a world, there will be opposition to the chosen of God. They may come at their peril; the way had been nearer, but bloody; they dare not go it, and yet complain of length.

If they were afraid to purchase their resting-place with war, how much less would they their passage? What should God do with impatient men? They will not go the nearest way, and yet complain to go about. He that will pass to the promised land, must neither stand upon length of way, nor difficulty. Every way hath its inconveniences: the nearest hath more danger, the farthest hath more pain: either, or both, must be overcome, if ever we will enter the rest of God.

Aaron and Miriam were now past the danger of their mutinies; for want of another match, they join God with Moses, in their murmurings: though they had not mentioned him, they could not sever him in their insurrection; for, in the causes of his own servants, he challenges even when he is not challenged. What will become of thee, O Israel, when thou makest thy Maker thine enemy! Impatience is the cousin to frenzy: this causes men not to take care upon whom they run, so they may breathe out some revenge. How oft have we heard men, that have been displeased by others, tear the name of their Maker in pieces? He that will judge, and can confound, is fetched into the quarrel without cause: but if to strive with a mighty man be unwise, and unsafe, what shall it be to strive with the mighty God?

As an angry child casts away that which is given him, because he hath not that he would, so do these foolish Israelites; their bread is light, and their water unsatisfying, because their way displeased them. Was ever people fed with such bread, or water? Twice hath the very rock yielded them water, and every day the heaven affords them bread. Did any one soul amongst them miscarry, either for hunger or thirst? But no bread will down with them, save that which the earth yields; no water but from the natural wells or rivers. Unless nature be allowed to be her own carver, she is never contented.

Manna had no fault, but that it was too good, and too frequent: the pulse of Egypt had been fitter for these coarse mouths: This heavenly bread was unspeakably delicious; it tasted like wafers of honey, and yet even this, angels' food, is contemned! He that is full, despiseth a honeycomb. How sweet and delicate is the gospel! Not only the fathers of the old testament, but the angels, desired to look into the glorious mysteries of it; and yet we are cloyed. This supernatural food is too light: the bread-corn of our human reason, and profound discourse would better content us.

Moses will not revenge this wrong, God will; yet will he not deal with them himself, but he sends the fiery serpents to answer for him. How fitly! They had carried themselves like serpents to their governors. How often had they stung Moses and Aaron near to death? If the serpent bite when he is not charmed, no better is a slanderer. Now these venomous adders revenge it, which are therefore called fiery, because their poison scaldeth to death. God hath a hand in the annoyance and hurt of the basest creature; how much less can the sting of an ill tongue, or the malice of an evil spirit, strike us without him? While they were in Goshen, the frogs, lice, caterpillars, spared them, and plagued the Egyptians; now they are rebellious in the desert, the serpents find them out and sting them to death. He that brought the quails thither to feed them, fetches these serpents thither to punish them. While we are at wars with God, we can look for no peace with his creatures. Every thing rejoices to execute the vengeance of its Maker. The stones of the field will not be in league with us, while we are not in league with God.

These men, when the spies had told them news of the giants of Canaan, a little before had wished, "Would God we were dead in this wilderness." Now God hath heard their prayers; what with the plague, what with the serpents, many thousands of them died. The ill wishes of our impatience are many times heard. As those good things are not granted us, which we pray for, without care; so those evils which we pray for, and would not have, are often granted. The ears of God are not only open to the prayers of faith, but to the imprecations of infidelity. It is dangerous wishing evil to ourselves, or ours; it is just with God to take us at our word, and to effect that which our lips speak against our heart.

Before, God had ever consulted with Moses, and threatened ere he punished: now, he strikes and says nothing. The anger is so much more, by how much less notified. When God is not heard before he is felt, (as in the hewing of wood, the blow is not heard till the axe be seen to have struck,) it is a fearful sign of displeasure. It is with God, as with us men, that still revenges are ever most dangerous. Till now, all was well enough with Israel, and yet they grudged: those that will complain without a cause, shall have cause to complain for something. Discontented humours seldom escape unpunished, but receive that most justly whereat they repined unjustly.

Now the people are glad to seek to Moses unbidden. Ever heretofore they have been wont to be sued to, and entreated for without their own entreaty; now their misery makes them importunate: there needs no solicitor, where there is sense of smart. It were pity men should want affliction, since it sends them to their prayers and confessions. All the persuasions of Moses, could not do that which the serpents have done for him. O God, thou seest how necessary it is we should be stung sometimes, else we should run wild, and never come to a sound humiliation. We should never seek thee, if thy hand did not find us out.

They had spoken against God and Moses, and now they humbly speak to Moses, that he would pray to God for them. He that so oft prayed for them unbidden, cannot but much more do it requested, and now obtains the means of their cure. It was equally in the power of God to remove the serpents, and to heal their stinging; to have cured the Israelites by his word, and by his sign: but he finds it best for his people (to exercise their faith) that the serpents may bite, and their bitings may envenom, and that this venom may endanger the Israelites; and that they thus affected, may seek to him for remedy, and seeking may find it from such means as should have no power but in signification; that while their bodies were cured by the sign, their souls might be confirmed by the matter signified. A serpent of brass could no more heal, than sting them. What remedy could their eyes give to their legs? or what could a serpent of cold brass prevail against a living and fiery serpent? In this troublesome desert, we are all stung by that fiery and old serpent. O Saviour, it is to thee we must look, and be cured; it is thou that wert their paschal lamb, their manna, their rock, their serpent. To all purposes dost thou vary thyself to thy church, that we may find thee everywhere. Thou art for our nourishment, refreshing, cure; as hereafter, so even now, all in all.

This serpent, which was appointed for cure to Israel, at last stings them to death by idolatrous abuse. What poison there is in idolatry, that makes even antidotes deadly! As Moses therefore raised this serpent, so Ezekias pulled it down. God commanded the raising of it, God approved the demolishing of it. Superstitious use can mar the very institutions of God: how much more the most wise and well-grounded devices of men!

CONTEMPLATION III.—OF BALAAM.

MOAB and Midian had been all this while standers by, and lookers on; if they had not seen the pattern of their own ruin in these neighbours, it had never troubled them to see the kings of the Amorites and Bashan to fall before Israel. Had not the Israelites camped in the plains of Moab, their victories had been no eye-sore to Balak. Wicked men never care to observe God's judgments, till themselves be touched. The fire of a neighbour's house would not so affect us, if it were not with the danger of our own. Secure minds never startle, till God come home to their very senses.

Balak and his Moabites had wit enough to fear, not wit enough to prevent judgment. They see an enemy in their borders, and yet take no right course for their safety. Who would not have looked, that they should have come to Israel with conditions of peace? Or why did they not think, either Israel's God is stronger than ours, or he is not? If he be not, why are we afraid of him? If he be, why do we not serve him? The same hand which gives them victory, can give us protection. Carnal men that are secure of the vengeance of God, ere it do come, are mastered with it, when it doth come; and, not knowing which way to turn them, run forth at the wrong door.

The Midianites join with the Moabites in consultation, in action, against Israel. One would have thought, they should have looked for favour from Moses for Jethro's sake, which was both a prince of their country and father-in-law to Moses, and either now, or not long before, was with Israel in the wilderness. Neither is it like, but that Moses, having found forty years' harbour amongst them, would have been (what he might) inclinable to favourable treaties with them; but now they are so fast linked to Moab, that they will either sink or swim together. Entireness with wicked consorts is one of the strongest chains of hell: and binds us to a participation both of sin and punishment. An easy occasion will knit wicked hearts together in conspiracy against the church of God.

Their errand is devilish; "Come curse Israel." That which Satan could not do by the swords of Og and Sihon, he will now try to effect by the tongue of Balaam. If either strength or policy would prevail against God's church, it could not stand. And why should not we be as industrious to promote the glory of God, and bend both our hands and heads to the causes of the Almighty? When all helps fail Moab, the magician is sought to. It is a sign of a desperate cause, to make Satan either our counsellor or our refuge.

Why did they not send to Balaam to bless themselves, rather than to curse Israel? It had been more easy to be defended from the hurt of their enemies, than to have their enemies laid open to be hurt by them. Pride and malice did not care so much for safety as for conquest. It would not content them to escape Israel, if Israel may escape them. It was not thank-worthy to save their own blood, if they did not spill the blood of others; as if their own prosperity had been nothing, if Israel also prospered. If there be one project worse than another, a wicked heart will find it out. Nothing but destruction will content the malicious.

I know not whether Balaam were more famous, or Balak more confident. If the king had not been persuaded of the strength of his charm, he had not sent so far, and paid so dear for it; now he trusts more to his enchantment, than to the forces of Moab and Midian; and, as if heaven and earth were in the power of a charmer's tongue, he saith, "He that thou blessest, is blessed; and he whom thou cursest, is cursed." Magic through the permission of God is powerful; for whatsoever the devil can do, the magician may do; but it is madness to think either of them omnipotent. If either the curses of men, or the endeavours of the powers of darkness, should be effectual, all would be hell. No, Balak. So short is the power of thy Balaam, that neither thou, nor thy prophet himself can avoid that curse, which thou wouldst have brought upon Israel. Had Balaam been a true prophet of God, this bold assurance had been but just. Both those ancient seers, and the prophets of the gospel, have the ratification of God in heaven to their sentences on earth. Why have we less care of the blessings, and less fear of the curses and censures of God's ministers? Who would not rather have Elisha's guard, than both the kings of Israel and Assyria? He himself, as he had the angelical chariots and horsemen about him, so was he the chariots and horsemen of Israel. Why should our faith be less strong than superstition? or why should God's agents have less virtue than Satan's?

I should wonder to hear God speak with a false prophet, if I did not know it had been no rare thing with him, as with men, to bestow words, even where he will not bestow favour. Pharaoh, Abimelech, Nebuchadnezzar, receive visions from God; neither can I think this strange, when I hear God speaking to Satan, in a question no less familiar than this of Balaam; "Whence comest thou," Satan? Not the sound of the voice of God, but the matter which he speaks, argues love. He may speak to an enemy; he speaks peace to none but his own. It is a vain brag, God hath spoken to me. So may he do to reprobates or devils. But what said he? Did he say to my soul, I am thy salvation? Hath he indented with me that he will be my God, and I shall be his? I cannot hear this voice, and not live.

God heard all the consultation and message of these Moabites; these messengers could not have moved their foot or their tongue but in him; and yet he which asked Adam where he was, asks Balaam, "What men are these?" I have ever seen that God loves to take occasion of proceeding with us from ourselves, rather than from his own immediate prescience. Hence it is, that we lay open our wants, and confess our sins to him that knows both better than our own hearts, because he will deal with us from our own mouths.

The prevention of God forbids both his journey and his curse. And what if he had been suffered to go and curse? What corn had this wind shaken, when God meant to bless them? How many bulls have bellowed out execrations against this church of God? What are we the worse? Yet I doubt if we had been so much blessed, had not those Balaamitish curses been spent upon us. He that knows what waste wind the causeless curses of wicked men are, yet will not have Balaam curse Israel; because he will not allow Balak so much encouragement in his opposition, as the conceit of this help. Or, perhaps, if Balak thought this sorcerer a true prophet, God would not have his name, so much as in the opinion of the heathen, scandalized, in usurping it to a purpose, which he meant not should succeed.

The hand of God is in the restraint of many evils, which we never knew to be towards us. The Israelites sat still in their tents; they little thought what mischief was brewing against them; without ever making them of counsel, God crosses the designs of their enemies. He that keepeth Israel, is both a sure and a secret friend. The reward of the divination had easily commanded the journey, and curse of the covetous prophet, if God had not stayed him. How oft are wicked men curbed by a divine hand, even in those sins which their heart stand to! It is no thank to lewd men that their wickedness is not prosperous. Whence is it that the world is not overrun with evil, but from this, that men cannot be so ill as they would?

The first entertainment of this message would make a stranger think Balaam wise and honest. He will not give a sudden answer, but craves leisure to consult with God, and promises to return the answer he shall receive. Who would not say, This man is free from rashness, from partiality? Dissimulation is crafty, and able to deceive thousands. The words are good; when he comes to action, the fraud bewrays itself; for both he insinuates his own forwardness, and casts the blame of the prohibition upon God, and, which is worse, delivers but half his answer. He says indeed, "God refuses to give me leave to go." He says not, as it was, "He charges me not to curse them, for they are blessed." So did Balaam deny, as one that wished to be sent for again. Perhaps a peremptory refusal had hindered his further solicitation. Concealment of some truths is sometimes as faulty as a denial. True fidelity is not niggardly in her relations.

Where wickedness meets with power, it thinks to command all the world, and takes great scorn of any repulse. So little is Balak discouraged with one refusal, that he sends so much the stronger message— More princes, and more honourable." O that we could be so importunate for our good, as wicked men are for the compassing of their own designs! A denial doth but whet the desires of vehement suitors. Why are we faint in spiritual things, when we are not denied, but delayed?

Those which are themselves transported with vanity and ambition, think that no heart hath power to resist these offers. Balak's princes thought they had struck it dead, when they had once mentioned promotion to great honour. Self-love makes them think they cannot be slaves, whilst others may be free; and that all the world would be glad to run on madding after their bait. Nature thinks it impossible to contemn honour and wealth; and, because too many souls are thus taken, cannot believe that any would escape. But let carnal hearts know, there are those can spit the world in the face, and say, "Thy gold and silver perish with thee;" and that in comparison of a good conscience, can tread under foot his best proffers like shadows, as they are: and that can do as Balaam said.

How near truth and falsehood can lodge together! Here was piety in the lips, and covetousness in the heart. Who can any more regard good words, that hears Balaam speak so like a saint? A house full of gold and silver may not pervert his tongue, his heart is won with less: for if he had not already swallowed the reward, and found it sweet, why did he again solicit God in that which was peremptorily denied him? If his mind had not been bribed already, why did he stay the messengers? Why did he expect a change in God? Why was he willing to feed them with hope of success, which had fed them with hope of recompense? One prohibition is enough for a good man. While the delay of God doth but hold us in suspense, importunity is holy and seasonable: but when once he gives a resolute denial, it is profane sauciness to solicit him. When we ask what we are bidden, our suits are not more vehement than welcome: but when we beg prohibited favours, our presumption is troublesome and abominable. No good heart will endure to be twice forbidden.

Yet this opportunity had obtained a permission; but a permission worse than a denial. I heard God say before, "Go not, nor curse them:" now he says, "Go, but curse not." Anon he is angry that he did not go. Why did he permit that which he forbade, if he be angry for doing that which he permitted? Some things God permits with an indignation; not for that he gives leave to the act, but that he gives a man over to his sin in the act. This sufferance implies not favour, but judgment. So did God bid Balaam to go as Solomon bids the young man follow the ways of his own heart. It is one thing to like, another thing to suffer. Moses never approved those legal divorces, yet he tolerated them. God never liked Balaam's journey, yet he displeasedly gives way to it; as if he said, Well, since thou art so hot, set on this journey; begone. And thus Balaam took it; else, when God after professed his displeasure for the journey, it had been a ready answer, "Thou commandest me." But herein his confession argues his guilt. Balaam's suit, and Israel's quails, had both one fashion of grant—in anger. How much better is it to have gracious denials, than angry yieldings?

A small persuasion heartens the willing. It booted not to bid the covetous prophet hasten to his way. Now he makes himself sure of success.

His corrupt heart tells him, that as God had relented in his license to go, so he might perhaps in his license to curse; and he saw how this curse might bless him with abundance of wealth: he rose up early therefore and saddled his ass. The night seemed long to his forwardness. Covetous men need neither clock nor bell to awaken them: their desires make them restless. O that we could, with as much eagerness, seek the true riches, which only can make us happy!

We, that see only the outside of Balaam, may marvel why he that permitted him to go, afterward opposes his going; but God, that saw his heart, perceived what corrupt affections carried him: he saw that his covetous desires and wicked hopes grew the stronger the nearer he came to his end. An angel is therefore sent to withhold the hasty sorcerer. Our inward disposition is the life of our actions; according to that doth the God of spirits judge us, while men censure according to our external motions. To go at all, when God had commanded to stay, was presumptuous; but to go, with a desire to curse, made the act doubly sinful, and fetched an angel to resist it. It is one of the worthy employments of good angels, to make secret opposition to evil designs. Many a wicked act have they hindered, without the knowledge of the agent. It is all one with the Almighty to work by spirits and men. It is therefore our glory to be thus set on work. To stop the course of evil, either by dissuasion or violence, is an angelical service.

In what danger are wicked men that have God's angels their opposites? The devil moved him to go; a good angel resists him. If a heavenly spirit stand in the way of a sorcerer's sin, how much more ready are all those spiritual powers to stop the miscarriages of God's dear children. How oft had we fallen yet more, if these guardians had not upheld us, whether by removing occasions, or by casting in good instincts? As our good endeavours are oft hindered by Satan, so are our evil by good angels; else were not our protection equal to our danger, and we could neither stand nor rise.

It had been as easy for the angel to strike Balaam, as to stand in his way; and to have followed him in his starting aside, as to stop him in a narrow path. But even the good angels have their stints in their executions. God had somewhat more to do with the tongue of Balaam, and therefore he will not have him slain, but withstood; and so withstood, that he shall pass. It is not so much glory to God to take away wicked men, as to use their evil to his own holy purposes. How soon could the commander of heaven and earth rid the world of bad members! But so should he lose the praise of working good by evil instruments. It sufficeth that the angels of God resist their actions, while their persons continue.

That no man may marvel to see Balaam have visions from God, and utter prophecies from him, his very ass hath his eyes opened to see the angel, which his master could not; and his mouth opened to speak more reasonably than his master. There is no beast deserves so much wonder as this of Balaam, whose common sense is advanced above the reason of his rider; so as for the time the prophet is brutish, and the beast prophetical. Who can but stand amazed at the eye, at the tongue of this silly creature! For so dull a sight, it was much to see a bodily object that were not too apparent; but to see that spirit, which his rider discerned not, was far beyond nature. To hear a voice come from that mouth, which was used only to bray, it was strange and uncouth; but to hear a beast, whose nature is noted for incapacity, to outreason his master, a professed prophet, is in the very height of miracles. Yet can no heart stick at these, that considers the dispensation of the Almighty in both. Our eye could no more see a beast, than a beast can see an angel, if he had not given this power to it. How easy is it for him, that made the eye of man and beast, to dim or enlighten it at his pleasure! And if his power can make the very stones to speak, how much more a creature of sense! That evil spirit spake in the serpent to our first parents; why is it more, that a spirit should speak in the mouth of a beast? How ordinarily did the heathen receive their oracles out of stones and trees? Do not we ourselves teach birds to speak those sentences they understand not? We may wonder, we cannot distrust, when we compare the act with the author, which can as easily create a voice without a body, as a body without a voice. Who now can hereafter plead his simplicity and dulness of apprehending spiritual things, when he sees how God exalts the eyes of a beast to see a spirit? Who can be proud of seeing visions, since an angel appeared to a beast?—neither was his skin better after it than others of his kind. Who can complain of his own rudeness and inability to reply in a good cause, when the very beast is enabled by God to convince his master? There is no mouth into which God cannot put words; and how oft doth he choose the weak and unwise, to confound the learned and mighty!

What had it been better for the ass to see the angel, if he had rushed still upon his sword? Evils were as good not seen, as not avoided; but now he declines the way, and saves his burden. It were happy for perverse sinners, if they could learn of this beast to run away from foreseen judgment. The revenging angel stands before us; and though we know we shall as sure die as sin, yet we have not the wit or grace to give back, though it be with the hurt of a foot, to save the body; with the pain of the body, to save the soul.

I see what fury and stripes the impatient prophet bestows upon this poor beast, because he will not go on: yet if he had gone on, himself had perished. How oft do we wish those things, the not obtaining whereof is mercy! We grudge to be stayed in the way to death, and fly upon those which oppose our perdition.

I do not, as who would not expect, see Balaam's hair stand upright, nor himself alighting, and appalled at this monster of miracles; but as if no new thing had happened, he returns words to the beast, full of anger, void of admiration. Whether his trade of sorcering had so inured him to receive voices from his familiars in shape of beasts, that this even seemed not strange to him; or whether his rage and covetousness had so transported him, that he had no leisure to observe the unnatural unusualness of the event. Some men make nothing of those things, which overcome others with horror and astonishment.

I hear the angel of God taking notice of the cruelty of Balaam to his beast; his first words, to the unmerciful prophet, are in expostulating of his wrong. We little think it, but God shall call us to an account for the unkind and cruel usages of his poor mute creatures. He hath made us lords, not tyrants; owners, not tormentors; he that hath given us leave to kill them for our use, hath not given us leave to abuse them at our pleasure: they are so our drudges, that they are our fellows by creation. It was a sign the magician would easily wish to strike Israel with a curse, when he wished a sword to strike his harmless beast. It is ill falling into those hands, whom beasts find unmerciful.

Notwithstanding these rubs, Balaam goes on, and is not afraid to ride on that beast, whose voice he had heard. And now posts are sped to Balak, with the news of so welcome a guest; he that sent princes to fetch him, comes himself on the way to meet him. Although he can say, "Am not I able to promote thee?" yet he gives this high respect to him as his better, from whom he expected the promotion of himself and his people. O the honour that hath been formerly done by heathens, to them that have borne but the face of prophets! I shame and grieve to compare the times and men. Only, O God, be thou merciful to the contempt of thy servants.

As if nothing needed but the presence of Balaam, the superstitious king, out of the joy of this hope, feasts his gods, his prophet, his princes; and, on the morrow, carries him up to the high places of his idols. Who can doubt, whether Balaam were a false prophet that sees him sacrificing in the mount of Baal? Had he been from the true God, he would rather have said, "Pull me down these altars of Baal, than build me here seven others." The very place convinces him of falsehood and idolatry. And why seven altars? what needs all this pomp? When the true God never required but one at once, as himself is one; why doth the false prophet call for no less than seven? As if God stood upon numbers! as if the Almighty would have his power either divided or limited! Here is nothing but a glorious and magnificent pretence of devotion. It hath been ever seen, that the false worshippers of God have made more pompous shows, and fairer flourishes of their piety and religion than the true.

Now, when Balaam sees his seven bullocks and seven rams smoking upon his seven altars, he goes up higher into the mount, as some counterfeit Moses, to receive the answer of God. But will God meet with a sorcerer? will he make a prophet of a magician? O man, who shall prescribe God what instruments to use! He knows how to employ, not only saints and angels, but; wicked men, beasts, devils, to his own glory. He that put words into the mouth of the ass, put words into the mouth of Balaam: the words do but pass from him; they are not polluted, because they are not his: as the trunk, through which a man speaks, is not more eloquent for the speech that is uttered through it. What a notable proclamation had the infidels wanted of God's favour to his people, if Balaam's tongue had not been used! How many shall once say, "Lord, we have prophesied in thy name," that shall hear, "Verily, I know ye not."

What madness is this in Balaam? He that found himself constant in soliciting, thinks to find God not constant in denying; and, as if that infinite Deity were not the same everywhere, hopes to change success with places. Neither is that bold forehead ashamed to importune God again, in that wherein his own mouth had testified an assurance of denial. The reward was in one of his eyes; the revenging angel in the other: I know not whether (for the time) he more loved the bribe or feared the angel. And, while he is in this distraction, his tongue blesses against his heart, and his heart curses against his tongue. It angers him that he dare not speak what he would; and now, at last, rather than lose his hopes, he resolves to speak worse than curses. The fear of God's judgment, in a worldly heart, is at length overcome with love of gain.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—OF PHINEAS.

BALAAM pretended a haste homeward, but he lingered so long that he left his bones in Midian. How justly did he perish with the sword of Israel, whose tongue had insensibly slain so many thousands of them! As it is usually said of the devil, that he goes away in a stench, so may it be truly said of this prophet of his, according to the fashion of all hypocrites, his words were good, his actions abominable; he would not curse, but he would advise, and his counsel is worse than a curse; for his curse had hurt none but himself; his counsel cost the blood of twenty-four thousand Israelites. He that had heard God speak by Balaam, would not look for the devil in the same mouth: and if God himself had not witnessed against him, who could believe that the same tongue, which uttered so divine prophecies, should utter such villanous and cursed advice? Hypocrisy gains this of men, that it may do evil unsuspected: but now, he that heard what he spake in Balak's ear, hath bewrayed and condemned his counsel and himself.

This policy was fetched from the bottom of hell. It is not for lack of desire that I curse not Israel; thou dost not more wish their destruction than I do thy wealth and honour; but so long as they hold firm with God, there is no sorcery against Jacob; withdraw God from them, and they shall fall alone, and curse themselves; draw them into sin, and thou shalt withdraw God from them. There is no sin more plausible than wantonness. One fornication shall draw in another, and both shall fetch the anger of God after them; send your fairest women into their tents, their sight shall draw them to lust, their lust to folly, their folly to idolatry; and now God shall curse them for thee unasked. Where Balaam did speak well, there was never any prophet spake more divinely; where he spake ill, there was never any devil spake more desperately. Ill counsel seldom succeedeth not: good seed falls often out of the way, and roots not, but the tares never light amiss. This project of the wicked magician was too prosperous. The daughters of Moab came into the tents of Israel, and have captivated those whom the Amorites and the Amalekites could not resist. Our first mother Eve bequeathed this dowry to her daughters, that they should be our helpers to sin; the weaker sex is the stronger in this conquest. Had the Moabites sent their subtilest counsellors to persuade the Israelites to their idol sacrifices, they had been repelled with scorn; but now the beauty of their women is over-eloquent and successful. That which in the first world betrayed the sons of God, hath now ensnared God's people. It had been happy for Israel, if Balaam had used any charms but these. As it is the use of God to fetch glory to himself out of the worst actions of Satan, so it is the guise of that evil one, through the just permission of the Almighty, to raise advantage to himself from the fairest pieces of the workmanship of God. No one means hath so much enriched hell as beautiful faces.

All idols are abominable; but this of Baal-peor was, besides the superstition of it, beastly: neither did Baal ever put on a form of so much shame as this. Yet very Israelites are drawn to adore it. When lust hath blinded the eyes, it carries a man whither it lists; even beyond all differences of sin. A man besotted with filthy desires, is fit for any villany.

Sin is no less crafty than Satan himself; give him but room in the eye, and he will soon be possessed of body and soul. These Israelites first saw the faces of these Moabites and Midianites; then they grew to like their presence; from thence to take pleasure in their feasts; from their boards they are drawn to their beds, from their beds to their idols; and now they are joined to Baal-peor, and separated from God. Bodily fornication is the way to spiritual. If we have made idols of flesh, it is just to be given up to idols of wood and stones. If we have not grace to resist the beginnings of sin, where shall we stay? If our foot slip into the mouth of hell, it is a miracle to stop ere we come to the bottom.

Well might God be angry to see his people go a whoring in this double fornication; neither doth he smother his wrath, but himself strikes with his plague, and bids Moses strike with the sword. He strikes the body, and bids Moses strike the head. It had been as easy for him to plague the rulers, as the vulgar; and one would think, these should be more properly reserved for his immediate hand; but these he leaves to the sword of human authority, that he might win awe to his own ordinances. As the sins of great men are exemplary, so are their punishments. Nothing procures so much credit to government, as strict and impartial executions of great and noble offenders. Those whom their sins have embased, deserve no favour in the punishment. As God knows no honour, no royalty in matter of sin, no more may his deputies. Contrarily, connivance at the outrages of the mighty, cuts the sinews of state; neither doth any thing make good laws more contemptible, than the making difference of offenders; that small sacrileges should be punished, when great ones ride in triumph. If good ordinations turn once to spiders' webs, which are broken through by the bigger flies, no hand will fear to sweep them down.

God was angry, Moses and all good Israelites grieved; the heads hanged up, the people plagued: yet behold one of the princes of Israel fears not to brave God and his ministers, in that sin which he sees so grievously revenged in others. I can never wonder enough at the impudence of this Israelite. Here is fornication, an odious crime, and that of an Israelite, whose name challenges holiness; yea, of a prince of Israel, whose practice is a rule to inferiors; and that with a woman of Midian, with whom even a chaste contract had been unlawful; and that with contempt of all government; and that in the face of Moses, and all Israel; and that in a time of mourning and judgment for that same offence. Those that have once passed the bounds of modesty soon grow shameless in their sins. While sin hides itself in corners, there is yet hope; for where there is shame, there is a possibility of grace; but when once it dare look upon the sun, and send challenges to authority, the case is desperate, and ripe for judgment. This great Simeonite thought he might sin by privilege: he goes, as if he said, Who dares control me? His nobility hath raised him above the reach of correction. Commonly the sins of the mighty are not without presumption, and therefore their vengeance is no less than their security: and their punishment is so much greater, as their conceit of impunity is greater. All Israel saw this bold lewdness of Zimri, but their hearts and eyes were so full of grief, that they had not room enough for indignation. Phineas looked on with the rest, but with other affections. When he saw this defiance bidden to God, and this insultation upon the sorrow of his people (that while they were wringing their hands, a proud miscreant durst outface their humiliation with his wicked dalliance,) his heart boils with a desire of a holy revenge; and now that hand, which was used to a censer and sacrificing knife, takes up his javelin, and, with one stroke, joins these two bodies in their death, which were joined in their sin, and, in the very flagrance of their lust, makes a new way for their souls to their own place. O noble and heroical courage of Phineas! which, as it was rewarded of God, so is worthy to be admired of men. He doth not stand casting of scruples; Who am I to do this? The son of the high priest. My place is all for peace and mercy; it is for me to sacrifice, and pray for the sin of the people, not to sacrifice any of the people for their sin. My duty calls me to appease the anger of God, what I may, not to revenge the sins of men; to pray for their conversion, not to work the confusion of any sinner. And who are these? Is not the one a great prince in Israel, the other a princess of Midian? Can the death of two so famous persons go unrevenged? Or, if it be safe and fit, why doth my uncle Moses rather shed his own tears than their blood? I will mourn with the rest; let them revenge whom it concerneth. But the zeal of God hath barred out all weak deliberations; and he holds it now both his duty and his glory, to be an executioner of so shameless a pair of offenders.

God loves this heat of zeal in all the carriages of his servants: and if it transport us too far, he pardoneth the errors of our fervency, rather than the indifferences of lukewarmness. As these two were more beasts than any that ever he sacrificed, so the shedding of their blood was the acceptablest sacrifice that ever he offered unto God: for both all Israel is freed from the plague, and all his posterity have the priesthood entailed to them, so long as the Jews were a people. Next to our prayers, there is no better sacrifice than the blood of malefactors; not as it is theirs, but as it is shed by authority. Governors are faulty of those sins they punish not. There can be no better sight in any state than to see a malefactor at the gallows. It is not enough for us to stand gazing upon the wickedness of the times, yea although with tears, unless we endeavour to redress it; especially public persons carry not their javelin in their hand for nought.

Every one is ready to ask Phineas for his commission: and those that are willing to salve up the act, plead extraordinary instinct from God, who, no doubt, would not have accepted that which himself wrought not. But what need I run so far for this warrant, when I hear God say to Moses, "Hang up all the heads of Israel;" and Moses say to the under-rulers, "Every one slay his men, that are joined to Baal-peor." Every Israelite is now made a magistrate for this execution; and why not Phineas amongst the rest? Doth his priesthood exempt him from the blood of sinners? How then doth Samuel hew Agag in pieces? Even those may make a carcass, which may not touch it. And if Levi got the priesthood by shedding the blood of idolaters, why may it not stand with that priesthood to spill the blood of a fornicator and idolater? Ordinary justice will bear out Phineas in this act. It is not for every man to challenge this office, which this double proclamation allowed to Phineas. All that private persons can do, is either to lift up their hands to heaven for redress of sin; or to lift up their hands against the sin, not against the person. "Who made thee a judge?" is a lawful question, if it meet with a person unwarranted.

Now the sin is punished, the plague ceaseth. The revenge of God sets out ever after the sin; but if the revenge of men (which commonly comes later) can overtake it, God gives other the chase. How oft hath the infliction of a less punishment avoided a greater. There are none so good friends to the state as courageous and impartial ministers of justice: these are the reconcilers of God and the people, more than the prayers of them that sit still and do nothing.

CONTEMPLATION V.—THE DEATH OF MOSES.

After many painful and perilous enterprises, now is Moses drawing to his rest. He hath brought his Israelites from Egypt, through the sea and wilderness, within the sight of their promised land: and now himself must take possession of that land whereof Canaan was but a type. When we have done what we came for, it is time for us to be gone. This earth is only made for action, not for fruition. The services of God's children should be ill rewarded, if they must stay here always. Let no man think much, that those are fetched away which are faithful to God; they should not change if it were not to their preferment. It is our folly that we would have good men live for ever, and account it a hard measure that they were. He that lends them to the world, owes them a better turn than this earth can pay them. It were injurious to wish, that goodness should hinder any man from glory. So is the death of God's saints precious, that it is certain.

Moses must go up to mount Nebo and die. The time, the place, and every circumstance of his dissolution is determined. That one dies in the field, another in his bed, another in the water, one in a foreign nation, another in his own, is fore-decreed in heaven. And though we hear it not vocally, yet God hath called every man by his name, and saith, Die thou there. One man seems to die casually, another by unexpected violence: both fall by a destiny; and all is set down to us by an eternal decree. He that brought us into the world, will carry us out according to his own purposes.

Moses must ascend up the hill to die. He received his charge for Israel upon the hill of Sinai; and now he delivers up his charge on the hill of Nebo; his brother Aaron died on one hill, he on another. As Christ was transfigured on a hill, so was this excellent type of his: neither doubt I, but that these hills were types to them of that heaven whither they were aspiring. It is the goodness of our God, that he will not have his children die any where, but where they may see the land of promise before them: neither can they depart without much comfort, to hav seen it: contrarily, a wicked man that looks down, and sees hell before him, how can he choose but find more horror in the end of death, than in the way!

How familiarly doth Moses hear of his end! It is no more betwixt God and Moses, but, Go up and die. If he had invited him to a meal, it could not have been in a more sociable compellation: no otherways than he said to his other prophet, Up and eat. It is neither harsh, nor news to God's children, to hear or think of their departure; to them, death hath lost his horror through acquaintance. Those faces which at first sight seemed ill-favoured, by oft viewing, grow out of dislike: they have so oft thought and resolved of the necessity, and of the issue of their dissolution, that they cannot hold it either strange or unwelcome. He that hath had such entire conversation with God, cannot fear to go to him. Those that know him not, or know that he will not know them, no marvel if they tremble.

This is no small favour, that God warns Moses of his end. He that had so oft made Moses of his counsel, what he meant to do with Israel, would not now do ought with himself without his knowledge. Expectation of any main event is a great advantage to a wise heart. If the fiery chariot had fetched away Elias unlooked for, we should have doubted of the favour of his transportation; it is a token of judgment, to come as a thief in the night. God forewarns one by sickness, another by age, another by his secret instincts, to prepare for their end. If our hearts be not now in a readiness, we are worthy to be surprised.

But what is this I hear? displeasure mixed with love, and that to so faithful a servant as Moses. He must but see the land of promise, he shall not tread upon it; because he once, long ago, sinned in distrusting. Death, though it were to him an entrance into glory, yet shall be also a chastisement of his infidelity. How many noble proofs had Moses given of his courage and strength of faith! How many gracious services had he done to his master! Yet, for one act of distrust, he must be gathered to his fathers. All our obediences cannot bear out one sin against God. How vainly shall we hope to make amends to God for our former trespasses, by our better behaviour, when Moses hath this one sin laid in his dish, after so many and worthy testimonies of his fidelity! When we have forgotten our sins, yet God remembers them, and, although not in anger, yet he calls for our arrearages. Alas! what shall become of them with whom God hath ten thousand greater quarrels, that, amongst many millions of sins, have scattered some few acts of formal services! If Moses must die the first death for one fault, how shall they escape the second for sinning always! Even where God loves, he will not wink at sin; and if he do not punish, yet he will chastise. How much less can it stand with that eternal justice, to let wilful sinners escape judgment!

It might have been just with God to have reserved the cause to himself; and, in a generality, to have told Moses, that his sin must shorten his journey; but it is more of mercy than justice, that his children shall know why they smart; that God may, at once, both justify himself and humble them for their particular offences. Those to whom he means vengeance, have not the sight of their sins, till they be past repentance. Complain not that God upbraids thee with thy old sins, whosoever thou art: but know it is an argument of love; whereas concealment is a fearful sign of a secret dislike from God.

But what was that noted sin which deserves this late exprobation, and shall carry so sharp a chastisement? Israel murmured for water; God bids Moses take the rod in his hand, and speak to the rock to give water; Moses, instead of speaking, and striking the rock with his voice, strikes it with his rod. Here was his sin, an over-reaching of his commission, a fearfulness and distrust of the effect. The rod, he knew, was approved for miracles: he knew not how powerful his voice might be; therefore he did not speak, but strike, and he struck twice for failing; and now, after these many years, he is stricken for it of God. It is a dangerous thing in divine matters, to go beyond our warrant. Those sins, which seem trivial to men, are heinous in the account of God. Any thing that savours of infidelity, displeases him more than some other crimes of morality. Yet the moving of the rod was but a diverse thing from the moving of the tongue; it was not contrary; he did not forbid the one, but he commanded the other: this was but across the stream, not against it. Where shall they appear, whose whole courses are quite contrary to the commandments of God?

Upon the act done, God passed the sentence of restraining Moses, with the rest, from the promised land: now he performs it. Since that time, Moses had many favours from God; all which could not reverse this decreed castigation. That everlasting rule is grounded upon the very essence of God; I am Jehovah, I change not. Our purposes are as ourselves, fickle and uncertain; his are certain and immutable. Some things which he reveals, he alters: nothing that he hath decreed. Besides the soul of Moses, to the glory whereof God principally intended this change, I find him careful of two things, his successor, and his body. Moses moves for the one; the other God doth unasked. He that was so tender over the welfare of Israel, in his life, would not slacken his care in death. He takes no thought for himself, for he knew how gainful an exchange he must make. All his care is for his charge. Some envious natures desire to be missed when they must go; and wish that the weakness, or want of a successor may be the foil of their memory and honour. Moses is in a contrary disposition; it sufficeth him not to find contentment in his own happiness, unless he may have an assurance that Israel shall prosper after him. Carnal minds are all for themselves, and make use of government only for their own advantages. But good hearts look ever to the future good of the Church, above their own, against their own. Moses did well, to show his good affection to his people; but, in his silence, God would have provided for his own. He that called him from the sheep of Jethro, will not want a governor for his chosen to succeed him: God hath fitted him whom he will choose. Who can be more meet than he, whose name, whose experience, whose graces might supply, yea, revive Moses to the people? He that searched the land before, was fittest to guide Israel into it. He, that was endued with the spirit of God, was the fittest deputy for God. He, that abode still in the tabernacle of Ohel-moed, as God's attendant, was fittest to be sent forth from him, as his lieutenant. But, O the unsearchable counsel of the Almighty! aged Caleb and all the princes of Israel, are past over, and Joshua, the servant of Moses, is chosen to succeed his master. The eye of God is not blinded either with gifts, or with blood, or with beauty, or with strength; but as in his eternal elections, so in his temporary, "He will have mercy on whom he will."

And well doth Joshua succeed Moses. The very acts of God of old were allegories. Where the law ends, there the Saviour begins. We may see the land of promise in the law: only Jesus, the Mediator of the new testament, can bring us into it. So was he a servant of the law, that he supplies all the defects of the law to us. He hath taken possession of the promised land for us: he shall carry us from this wilderness to our rest.

It is no small happiness to any state, when their governors are chosen by worthiness; and such elections are ever from God; whereas the intrusions of bribery, and unjust favour, or violence, as they make the commonwealth miserable, so they come from him which is the author of confusion. Woe be to that state that suffers it; woe be to that person that works it; for both of them have sold themselves, the one to servitude, the other to sin.

I do not hear Moses repine at God's choice, and grudge that this sceptre of his is not hereditary; but he willingly lays hands upon his servant, to consecrate him for his successor. Joshua was a good man, yet he had some sparks of envy; for when Eldad and Medad prophesied, he stomached it; "My lord Moses, forbid them." He, that would not abide two of the elders of Israel to prophesy, how would he have allowed his servant to sit in his throne? What an example of meekness, besides all the rest, doth he here see in this last act of his master, who, without all murmuring, resigns his chair of state to his page? It is all one to a gracious heart, whom God will please to advance. Emulation and discontentment are the affections of carnal minds. Humility goes ever with regeneration; which teaches a man to think, whatever honour be put upon others, I have more than I am worthy of.

The same God, that, by the hands of his angels, carried up the soul of Moses to his glory, doth also, by the hand of his angels, carry his body down into the valley of Moab to his sepulchre. Those hands which had taken the law from him, those eyes that had seen his presence, those lips that had conferred so oft with him, that face that did so shine with the beams of his glory, may not be neglected when the soul is gone. He that took charge of his birth, and preservation in the reeds, takes charge of his carriage out of the world. The care of God ceaseth not over his own, either in death, or after it. How justly do we take care of the comely burials of our friends, when God himself gives us this example!

If the ministry of man had been used in this grave of Moses, the place might have been known to the Israelites? but God purposely conceals this treasure, both from men and devils, that so he might both cross their curiosity, and prevent their superstition. If God had loved the adoration of his servants' reliques, he could never have had a fitter opportunity for this devotion, than in the body of Moses. It is folly to place religion in those things, which God hides on purpose from us: it is not the property of the Almighty to restrain us from good.

Yet that divine hand, which locked up this treasure, and kept the key of it, brought it forth afterwards glorious. In the transfiguration, this body which was hid in the valley of Moab, appeared in the hill of Tabor, that we may know these bodies of ours are not lost, but laid up, and shall as sure be raised in glory, as they are laid down in corruption. "We know that when he shall appear we shall also appear with him in glory."

BOOK VIII.

CONTEMPLATION I.—OF RAHAB.

JOSHUA was one of those twelve searchers which were sent to view the land of Canaan; yet now he addresses two spies, for a more particular survey. Those twelve were only to inquire of the general condition of the people and land; these two find out the best entrance into the next part of the country, and into their greatest city. Joshua himself was full of God's spirit, and had the oracle of God ready for his direction: yet now he goes not to the propitiatory for consultation, but to the spies. Except where ordinary means fail us, it is no appealing to the immediate help of God; we may not seek to the postern, but where the common gate is shut. It was promised Joshua, that he should lead Israel into the promised land; yet he knew it was unsafe to presume. The condition of his provident care was included in that assurance of success. Heaven is promised to us, but not to our carelessness, infidelity, disobedience. He that hath set this blessed inheritance before us presupposes our wisdom, faith, holiness.

Either force or policy are fit to be used unto Canaanites. He that would be happy in this spiritual warfare, must know where the strength of his enemy lieth; and must frame his guard according to the other's assault. It is a great advantage to a Christian to know the fashion of Satan's onsets, that he may the more easily compose himself to resist. Many a soul hath miscarried through the ignorance of his enemy, which had not perished, if it had well known that the weakness of Satan stands in our faith.

The spies can find no other lodging but Rahab's house. She was a victualler by profession, and (as those persons and trades, by reason of the commonness of entertainment, were amongst the Jews infamous by name and note) she was Rahab the harlot. I will not think she professed filthiness; only her public trade, through the corruption of those times, hath cast upon her this name of reproach: yea, rather will I admire her faith, than make excuses for her calling. How many women in Israel (now Miriam was dead) have given such proofs of their knowledge and faith! How noble is that confession which she makes of the power and truth of God! Yea, I see here not only a disciple of God, but a prophetess. Or, if she had once been public, as her house was, now she is a chaste and worthy convert; and so approved herself for honest and wise behaviour, that she is thought worthy to be the great grandmother of David's father: and the holy line of the Messias is not ashamed to admit her into that happy pedigree. The mercy of our God doth not measure us by what we were. It would be wide with the best of us, if the eye of God should look backward to our former estate: there we shall see Abraham an idolater; Paul a persecutor; Manasses a necromancer; Mary Magdalen a courtezan; and the best vile enough to be ashamed of himself. Who can despair of mercy, that sees even Rahab fetched into the blood of Israel, and line of Christ!

If Rahab had not received these spies, but as unknown passengers, with respect to their money, and not to their errand, it had been no praise: for in such cases, the thank is rather to the guest than to the host. But now she knew their purpose; she knew that the harbour of them was the danger of her own life; and yet she hazards this entertainment. Either faith or friendship are never tried, but in extremities. To show countenance to the messengers of God, while the public face of the state smiles upon them, is but a courtesy of course; but to hide our own lives in theirs, when they are persecuted, is an act that looks for a reward. These times need not our favour; we know not what may come. Alas! how likely is it they would shelter them in danger, which respect them not in prosperity!

All intelligences of state come first to the court. It most concerns princes to hearken after the affairs of each other. If this poor innholder knew of the sea dried up before Israel, and of the discomfiture of Og and Sihon; surely this rumour was stale with the king of Jericho: he had heard it, and feared; and yet, instead of sending ambassadors for peace, he sends pursuivants for the spies. The spirit of Rahab melted with that same report, wherewith the king of Jericho was hardened. All make not one use of the messages of the proceedings of God.

The king sends to tell her what she knew; she had not hid them, if she had not known their errand. I know not whether first to wonder at the gracious provision of God for the spies, or at the strong faith which he wrought in the heart of a weak woman. Two strangers, Israelites, spies, (and noted for all these) in a foreign, in a hostile land, have a safe harbour provided them even amongst their enemies; in Jericho, at the very court-gate, against the proclamation of a king, against the endeavours of the people. Where cannot the God of heaven either find, or raise up friends, to his own causes and servants?

Who could have hoped for such faith in Rahab? which contemned her life for the present, that she might save it for the future; neglected her own king and country, for strangers which she never saw; and more feared the destruction of that city, before it knew that it had an adversary, than the displeasure of her king, in the mortal revenge of that which he would have accounted treachery. She brings them up to the roof of her house, and hides them with stalks of flax. That plant, which was made to hide the body from nakedness and shame, now is used to hide the spies from death. Never could these stalks have been improved so well with all her housewifery, after they were bruised, as now, before they were fitted to her wheel: of these she hath woven an everlasting web, both of life and propagation. And now her tongue hides them no less than her hand. Her charity was good, her excuse was not good. "Evil may not be done, that good may come of it;" we may do any thing, but sin, for promoting a good cause: and, if not in so main occasions, how shall God take it, that we are not dainty of falsehoods in trifles?

No man will look that these spies could take any sound sleep in these beds of stalks; it is enough for them that they live, though they rest not. And now, when they hear Rahab coming up the stairs, doubtless they looked for an executioner; but behold, she comes up with a message better than their sleep, adding to their protection advice for their future safety; whereto she makes way by a faithful report of God's former wonders, and the present disposition of her people; and by wise capitulations for the life and security of her family. The news of God's miraculous proceedings for Israel have made her resolve of their success, and the ruins of Jericho. Then only do we make a right use of the works of God, when, by his judgments upon others, we are warned to avoid our own. He intends his acts for precedents of justice.

The parents and brethren of Rahab take their rest; they are not troubled with the fear and care of the success of Israel, but securely go with the current of the present condition. She watches for them all; and breaks her midnight sleep, to prevent their last. One wise and faithful person does well in a house: where all are careless, there is no comfort but in perishing together. It had been an ill nature in Rahab, if she had been content to be saved alone. That her love might be a match to her faith, she covenants for all her family, and so returns life to those of whom she received it. But the bond of nature, and of grace, will draw all ours to the participation of the same good with ourselves.

It had been never the better for the spies, if, after this night's lodging, they had been turned out of doors to the hazard of the way; for so the pursuers had light upon them, and prevented their return with their death. Rahab's counsel therefore was better than her harbour; which sent them (no doubt with victuals in their hands) to seek safety in the mountains, till the heat of that search were past. He that hath given us charge of our lives, will not suffer us to cast them upon wilful adventures. Had not these spies hid themselves in those desert hills, Israel had wanted directors for the enterprises. There is nothing more expedient for the church, than that some of God's faithful messengers should withdraw themselves, and give way to persecutions. Courage, in those that must die, is not a greater advantage to the gospel, than a prudent retiring of those, which may survive, to maintain and propagate it.

It was a just and reasonable transaction betwixt them, that her life should be saved by them, which had saved theirs; they owe no less to her, to whom they were not so much guests as prisoners. And now they pass not their promise only, but their oath. They were strangers to Rahab, and, for ought she knew, might have been godless; yet she dares trust her life upon their oath. So sacred and inviolable hath this bond ever been, that a heathen woman thought herself secure upon the oath of an Israelite.

Neither is she more confident of their oath taken, than they are careful both of taking and performing it. So far are they from desiring to salve up any breach of promise by equivocation, that they explain all conditions, and would prevent all possibilities of violation. All Rahab's family must be gathered into her house; and that red cord, which was an instrument of their delivery, must be a sign of hers. Behold, this is the saving colour! the destroying angel sees the door-cheeks of the Israelites sprinkled with red, and passes them over. The warriors of Israel see the window of Rahab dyed with red, and save her family from the common destruction. If our souls have this tincture of the precious blood of our Saviour upon our doors or windows, we are safe.

But if any one of the brethren of Rahab shall fly from this red flag, and rove about the city, and not contain himself under that roof which hid the spies, it is in vain for him to tell the avengers, that he is Rahab's brother. That title will not save him in the street—within doors it will. If we will wander out of the limits that God hath set us, we cast ourselves out of his protection. We cannot challenge the benefit of his gracious preservation, and our most precious redemption, when we fly out into the bye-ways of our own hearts, not for innocence, but for safety and harbour. The church is that house of Rahab which is saved, when all Jericho shall perish. While we keep us in the lists thereof, we cannot miscarry through misopinion; but, when once we run out of it, let us look for judgment from God, and error in our own judgment.

CONTEMPLATION II.—JORDAN DIVIDED.

The two spies returned with news of the victory that should be. I do not hear them say, The land is unpeopled; or the people are unfurnished with arms; unskilful in the discipline of war; but "They faint because of us, therefore their land is ours." Either success, or discomfiture, begins ever at the heart. A man's inward disposition doth more than presage the event. As a man raises up his own heart before his fall, and depresses it before his glory; so God raises it up before his exaltation, and casts it down before his ruin. It is no otherwise in our spiritual conflicts. If Satan sees us once faint, he gives himself the day. There is no way to safety, but that our hearts be the last that shall yield. That which the heathens attributed to fortune, we may justly to the hand of God, that he speedeth those that are forward. All the ground that we lose, is given to our adversaries.

This news is brought but over night; Joshua is on his way by morning, and prevents the sun for haste. Delays, whether in the business of God or our own, are hateful and prejudicial. Many a one loses the land of promise by lingering. If we neglect God's time, it is just with him to cross us in ours.

Joshua hastens till he has brought Israel to the verge of the promised land: nothing parts them now but the river of Jordan. There he stays a time, that the Israelites might feed themselves a while with the sight of that which they should afterwards enjoy. That which they had been forty years in seeking, may not be seized upon too suddenly. God loves to give us cools and heats in our desires; and will so allay our joys, that their fruition hurt us not. He knows, that as it is in meats, the long forbearance whereof causes a surfeit when we come to full feed; so it fares in the contentments of the mind: therefore he feeds us not with the dish, but with the spoon, and will have us neither cloyed nor famished. If the mercy of God have brought us within sight of heaven, let us be content to pause a while, and, upon the banks of Jordan, fit ourselves for our entrance.

Now, that Israel is brought to the brim of Canaan, the cloud is vanished which led them all the way; and, as soon as they have but crossed Jordan, the manna ceaseth, which nourished them all the way. The cloud and manna were for their passage, not for their rest; for the wilderness, not for Canaan. It were as easy for God to work miracles always; but he knows that custom were the way to make them no miracles. He goes bye-ways but till he have brought us into the road, and then he refers us to his ordinary proceedings. That Israelite should have been very foolish, that would still have said, I will not stir till I see the cloud; I will not eat, unless I may have that food of angels. Wherefore serves the ark, but for their direction?—wherefore serves the wheat of Canaan, but for bread? So fond is that Christian, that will still depend upon expectation of miracles, after the fulness of God's kingdom. If God bear us in his arms when we are children, yet when we are well grown, he looks we should go on our own feet: it is enough that he upholds us, though he carry us not.

He, that hitherto had gone before them in the cloud, doth now go before them in the ark; the same guide in two diverse signs of his presence. The cloud was for Moses, the ark for Joshua's time. The cloud was fit for Moses; the law offered us Christ, but enwrapped in many obscurities. If he were seen in the cloud, he was heard from the cover of the ark. Why was it the ark of the testimony, but because it witnessed both his presence and love; and within it were his word the law, and his sacrament the manna? Who can wish a better guide than the God of heaven, in his word and sacraments? Who can know the way into the land of promise so well as he that owns it?—and what means can better direct us thither than those of his institution?

That ark, which before was as the heart, is now as the head; it was in the midst of Israel, while they camped in the desert; now, when the cloud is removed, it is in the front of the army; that, as before they depended upon it for life, so now they should for direction. It must go before them on the shoulders of the sons of Levi: they must follow it, but within sight, not within breathing. The Levites may not touch the ark, but only the bars: the Israelites may not approach nearer than a thousand paces to it. What awful respects doth God require to be given unto the testimonies of his presence! Uzzah paid dear, for touching it; the men of Bethshemesh for looking into it. It is a dangerous thing to be too bold with the ordinances of God. Though the Israelites were sanctified, yet they might not come near either the mount of Sinai, when the law was delivered, or the ark of the covenant, wherein the law was written. How fearful shall their estate be, that come with unhallowed hearts and hands to the word of the gospel, and the true manna of the evangelical sacrament? As we use to say of the court, and of fire, so may we of these divine institutions,—We freeze, if we be far off from them; and if we be more near than befits us, we burn. Under the law we might look at Christ aloof; now, under the gospel, we may come near him: he calls us to him; yea, he enters into us.

Neither was it only for reverence that the ark must be not stumbled at, but waited on afar; but also for convenience, both of sight and passage. Those things that are near us, though they be less, fill our eye; neither could so many thousand eyes see the same object upon a level, but by distance. It would not content God, that one Israelite should tell another. Now the ark goes, now it turns, now it stands; but he would have every one his own witness. What can be so comfortable to a good heart, as to see the pledges of God's presence and favour? To hear the loving-kindnesses of God is pleasant; but to behold and feel the evidences of his mercy is unspeakably delectable. Hence the saints of God, not contenting themselves with faith, have still prayed for sight and fruition, and mourned when they have wanted it. What a happy prospect hath God set before us of Christ Jesus crucified for us, and offered unto us!

Ere God will work a miracle before Israel, they have charge to be sanctified. There is a holiness required, to make us either patients or beholders of the great works of God; how much more, when we should be actors in his sacred services! There is more use of sanctification when we must present something to God, than when he must do ought to us.

The same power that divided the Red Sea before Moses, divides Jordan before Joshua, that they might see the ark no less effectual than the cloud; and the hand of God as present with Joshua to bring them into Canaan, as it was with Moses to bring them out of Egypt. The bearers of the ark had need be faithful; they must first set their foot into the streams of Jordan, and believe that it will give way; the same faith that led Peter upon the water, must carry them into it. There can be no Christian without belief in God; but those that are near to God in his immediate services, must go before others, no less in believing, than they do in example.

The waters know their Maker. That Jordan, that flowed with full streams when Christ went into it to be baptized, now gives way, when the same God must pass through it in state. Then there was use of his water, now of his sand. I hear no news of any rod to strike the waters; the presence of the ark of the Lord God, the Lord of all the world, is sign enough to these waves, which now, as if a sinew were broken, run back to their issues, and dare not so much as wet the feet of the priests that bore it. "What aileth thee, O sea, that thou fleddest, and thou Jordan, that thou wert driven back! Ye mountains that ye leaped like rams, and ye little hills, like lambs! The earth trembled at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob." How observant are all the creatures to the God that made them! How glorious a God do we serve! whom all the powers of the heavens and elements are willingly subject unto, and gladly take that nature which he pleases to give them. He could have made Jordan like some solid pavement of crystal, for the Israelites' feet to have trode upon; but this work had not been so magnificent. Every strong frost congeals the water, in a natural course: but for the river to stand still, and run on heaps, and to be made a liquid wall for the passage of God's people, is for nature to run out of itself, to do homage to her Creator. Now must the Israelites needs think, how can the Canaanites stand out against us, when the seas and rivers give us way? With what joy did they now trample upon the dry channel of Jordan, while they might see the dry deserts overcome, the promised land before them, the very waters so glad of them that they ran back to welcome them into Canaan? The passages into our promised land are troublesome and perilous, and even at last offer themselves to us the main hindrances of our salvation, which, after all our hopes, threaten to defeat us: for what will it avail us to have passed a wilderness, if the waves of Jordan should swallow us up? But the same hand that hath made the way hard, hath made it sure; he that made the wilderness comfortable, will make Jordan dry: he will master all difficulties for us; and those things which we most feared, will he make most sovereign and beneficial to us. O God, as we have trusted thee with the beginning, so will we with the finishing of our glory! Faithful art thou that hast promised, which wilt also do it.

He that led them about, in forty years' journey through the wilderness, yet now leads them the nearest cut to Jericho; he will not so much as seek for a ford for their passage, but divides the waters. What a sight was this to their heathen adversaries, to see the waters make both a lane and a wall for Israel! Their hearts could not choose but be broken, to see the streams broken off for a way to their enemies. I do not see Joshua hastening through this channel, as if he feared lest the tide of Jordan should return; but, as knowing that watery wall stronger than the walls of Jericho, he paces slowly; and, lest this miracle should pass away with themselves, he commands twelve stones to be taken out of the channel of Jordan by twelve selected men from every tribe, which shall be pitched in Gilgal: and twelve other stones to be set in the midst of Jordan, where the feet of the priests had stood with the ark; that so both land and water might testify the miraculous way of Israel: while it should be said of the one, These stones were fetched out of the pavement of Jordan; of the other, There did the ark rest while we walked dry-shod the deeps of Jordan: of the one, Jordan was once as dry as this Gilgal; of the other, Those waves which drown these stones, had so drowned us, if the power of the Almighty had not restrained them. Many a great work had God done for Israel, which was now forgotten: Joshua therefore will have monuments of God's mercy, that future ages might be both witnesses and applauders of the great works of their God.

CONTEMPLATION III.—THE SIEGE OF JERICHO.

JOSHUA begins his wars with the circumcision and passover; he knew that the way to keep the blood of his people from shedding, was to let out that paganish blood of their uncircumcision. The person must be in favour, ere the work can hope to prosper. His predecessor Moses had like to have been slain for neglect of this sacrament, when he went to call the people out of Egypt: he justly fears his own safety, if now he omit it, when they are brought into Canaan. We have no right of inheritance in the spiritual Canaan, the church of God, till we have received the sacrament of our matriculation. So soon as our covenants are renewed with our Creator, we may well look for the vision of God for the assurance of victory.

What sure work did the king of Jericho think he had made!—he blocked up the passages, barred up the gates, defended the walls, and did enough to keep out a common enemy. If we could do but this to our spiritual adversaries, it were as impossible for us to be surprised, as for Jericho to be safe. Methinks I see how they called their council of war, debated of all means of defence, gathered their forces, trained their soldiers, set strong guards to the gates and walls; and now would persuade one another, that, unless Israel could fly into their city, the siege was vain. Vain worldlings think their rampires and barricadoes can keep out the vengeance of God; their blindness suffers them to look no further than the means. The supreme hand of the Almighty comes not within the compass of their fears. Every carnal heart is a Jericho shut up; God sits down before it, and displays mercy and judgment in sight of the walls thereof: it hardens itself in a wilful security, and saith, "Tush, I shall never be moved."

Yet their courage and fear fight together within their walls, within their bosoms. Their courage tells them of their own strength; their fear suggests the miraculous success of this (as they could not but think) enchanted generation; and now, while they have shut out their enemy, they have shut in their own terror. The most secure heart in the world hath some flashes of fear; for it cannot but sometimes look out of itself, and see what it would not. Rahab had notified that their hearts fainted; and yet now their faces bewray nothing but resolution. I know not whether the heart or the face of a hypocrite be more false; and as each of them seeks to beguile the other, so both of them agree to deceive the beholders. In the midst of laughter their heart is heavy. Who would not think him merry that laughs? yet their rejoicing is but in the face. Who would not think a blasphemer, or profane man, resolutely careless? If thou hadst a window into his heart, thou shouldst see him tormented with horrors of conscience.

Now the Israelites see those walled cities and towers, whose height was reported to reach to heaven, the fame whereof had so affrighted them, ere they saw them, and were ready, doubtless, to say, in their distrust, Which way shall we scale these invincible fortifications? What ladders, what engines shall we use to so great a work? God prevents their infidelity; "Behold, I have given Jericho into thine hand." If their walls had their foundations laid in the centre of the earth; if the battlements had been so high built, that an eagle could not soar over them; this is enough, "I have given it thee." For, on whose earth have they raised these castles? out of whose treasure did they dig those piles of stone? whence had they their strength and time to build? Cannot he that gave, recall his own? O ye fools of Jericho! what if your walls be strong, your men valiant, your leaders skilful, your king wise, when God hath said, "I have given thee the city!" What can swords or spears do against the Lord of hosts! Without him means can do nothing; how much less against him! How vain and idle is that reckoning, wherein God is left out! Had the captain of the Lord's host drawn his sword for Jericho, the gates might have been opened; Israel could no more have entered, than they can now be kept from entering when the walls were fallen. What courses soever we take for our safety it is good making God of our side. Neither men nor devils can hurt us against him; neither men nor angels can secure us from him. There was never so strange a siege as this of Jericho: here was no mount raised, no sword drawn, no engine planted, no pioneers undermining; here were trumpets sounded, but no enemy seen; here were armed men, but no stroke given: they must walk and not fight; seven several days must they pace about the walls, which they may not once look over, to see what was within. Doubtless these inhabitants of Jericho made themselves merry with this sight: when they had stood six days upon their walls, and beheld none but a walking enemy; What, say they, could Israel find no walk to breathe them with, but about our walls? Have they not travelled enough in their forty years' pilgrimage, but they must stretch their limbs in this circle? Surely if their eyes were engines, our wall could not stand: we see they are good footmen; but when shall we try their hands? What, do these vain men think Jericho will be won with looking at? or do they only come to count how many paces it is about our city? If this be their manner of siege, we shall have no great cause to fear the sword of Israel. Wicked men think God in jest, when he is preparing for their judgment. The Almighty hath ways and counsels of his own, utterly unlike to ours; which, because our reason cannot reach, we are ready to condemn as foolishness and impossibility. With us, there is no way to victory but fighting, and the strongest carries the spoil: God can give victory to the feet, as well as to the hands; and, when he will, makes weakness no disadvantage. What should we do but follow God through by-ways, and know that he will, in spite of nature, lead us to our end?

All the men of war must compass the city; yet it was not the presence of the great warriors of Israel that threw down the walls of Jericho. Those foundations were not so slightly laid, as that they could not endure either a look, or a march, or a battery. It was the ark of God whose presence demolished the walls of that wicked city. The same power that drave back the waters of Jordan before, and afterwards laid Dagon on the floor, cast down all those forts. The priests bear on their shoulders that mighty engine of God, before which those walls, if they had been of molten brass, could not stand. Those spiritual wickednesses, yea, those gates of hell, which to nature are utterly invincible, by the power of the word of God (which he hath committed to the carriage of his weak servants) are overthrown, and triumphed over. Thy ark, O God, hath been long amongst us; how is it that the walls of our corruptions stand still unruined? It hath gone before us, his priests have carried it; we have not followed it, our hearts have not attended upon it; and therefore, how mighty soever it is in itself, yet to us it hath not been so powerful as it would.

Seven days together they walked this round; they made this therefore their Sabbath-day's journey; and who knows whether the last and longest walk, which brought victory to Israel, were not on this day? Not long before, an Israelite is stoned to death, for but gathering a few sticks that day: now, all the host of Israel must walk about the walls of a large and populous city, and yet do not violate the day. God's precept is the rule of the justice and holiness of all our actions. Or was it, for that revenge upon God's enemies is a holy work, and such as God vouchsafes to privilege with his own day? or, because when we have undertaken the exploits of God, he will abide no intermission till we have fulfilled them? He allows us not to breathe, not to break off, till we have finished.

It had been as easy for God to have given this success to their first day's walk; yea to their first pace, or their first sight of Jericho; yet he will not give it, until the end of their seven days' toil. It is the pleasure of God to hold us both in work, and in expectation; and though he require our continual endeavours for the subduing of our corruptions, during the six days of our life, yet we shall never find it perfectly effected till the very evening of our last day. In the meantime, it must content us that we are in our walk, and that these walls cannot stand, when we come to the measure and number of our perfections. A good heart groans under the sense of his infirmities, fain would be rid of them, and strives and prays: but, when he hath all done, until the end of the seventh day it cannot be. If a stone or two moulder off from these walls, in the meantime, that is all; but the foundations will not be removed till then.

When we hear of so great a design as the miraculous winning of a mighty city, who would not look for some glorious means to work it? When we hear that the ark of God must besiege Jericho, who would not look for some royal equipage? But behold here seven priests must go before it, with seven trumpets of rams' horns. The Israelites had trumpets of silver, which God had appointed for the use of assembling and dissolving the congregation, for war, and for peace: now I do not hear them called for; but instead thereof, trumpets of rams' horns, base for the matter, and not loud for sound; the shortness and equal measure of those instruments could not afford either shrillness of noise, or variety. How mean and homely are those means which God commonly uses in the most glorious works! No doubt the citizens of Jericho answered this dull alarm of theirs from their walls with other instruments of louder report and more martial ostentation: and the vulgar Israelites thought, we have as clear and as costly trumpets as theirs; yet no man dares offer to sound the better, when the worse are commanded. If we find the ordinances of God poor and weak, let it content us that they are of his own choosing, and such as whereby he will so much more honour himself, as they in themselves are more inglorious. Not the outside, but the efficacy, is it that God cares for.

No ram of iron could have been so forcible for battery, as these rams' horns: for when they sounded long, and were seconded with the shout of the Israelites, all the walls of Jericho fell down at once. They made the heavens ring with their shout: but the ruin of those walls drowned their voice and gave a pleasant kind of horror to the Israelites. The earth shook under them with the fall; but the hearts of the inhabitants shook yet more. Many of them, doubtless, were slain with those walls wherein they had trusted. A man might see death in the faces of all the rest that remained, who now, being half dead with astonishment, expected the other half from the sword of their enemies. They had now neither means nor will to resist; for if only one breach had been made (as it uses in other sieges) for the entrance of the enemy, perhaps new supplies of defendants might have made it up with their carcasses: but now that, at once, Jericho is turned to a plain field, every Israelite, without resistance, might run to the next booty; and the throats of their enemies seemed to invite their swords to a despatch.

If but one Israelite had knocked at the gates of Jericho, it might have been thought their hand had helped to the victory. Now, that God may have all the glory, without the show of any rival, yea, of any means, they do but walk and shout, and the walls give way. He cannot abide to part with any honour from himself. As he doth all things, so he would be acknowledged.

They shout all at once. It is the presence of God's ark, and our conjoined prayers, that are effectual to the beating down of wickedness. They may not shout till they be bidden. If we will be unseasonable in our good actions, we may hurt and not benefit ourselves.

Every living thing in Jericho, man, woman, child, cattle, must die. Our folly would think this merciless; but there can be no mercy in injustice, and nothing but injustice in not fulfilling the charge of God. The death of malefactors, the condemnation of wicked men, seem harsh to us; but we must learn of God, that there is a punishing mercy. Cursed be that mercy that opposes the God of mercy.

Yet was not Joshua so intent upon the slaughter, as not to be mindful of God's part and Rahab's. First, he gives charge, under a curse, of reserving all the treasure for God; then of preserving the family of Rahab. Those two spies that received life from her, now return it to her, and hers: they call at the window with the red cord, and send up news of life to her, the same way which they received theirs. Her house is no part of Jericho: neither may fire be set to any building of that city, till Rahab and her family be set safe without the host. The actions of our faith and charity will be sure to pay us; if late, yet surely. Now Rahab finds what it is to believe God; while out of an impure idolatrous city, she is transplanted into the church of God, and made a mother of a royal and holy posterity.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—OF ACHAN.

When the walls of Jericho were fallen, Joshua charged the Israelites but with two precepts: of sparing Rahab's house, and of abstaining from that treasure which was anathematized to God; and one of them is broken. As in the entrance to Paradise, but one tree was forbidden, and that was eaten of. God had provided for our weakness in the paucity of commands; but our innocency stands not so much in having few precepts, as in keeping those we have. So much more guilty are we in the breach of the one, as we are more favoured in the number.

They needed no command to spare no living thing in Jericho; but to spare the treasure, no command was enough. Impartiality of execution is easier to perform, than contempt of these worldly things; because we are more prone to covet for ourselves, than to pity others. Had Joshua bidden save the men, and divide the treasure, his charge had been more plausible, than now to kill the men and save the treasure; or, if they must kill, earthly minds would more gladly shed their enemies' blood for a booty, than out of obedience, for the glory of their Maker. But now it is good reason, since God threw down those walls, and not they, that both the blood of that wicked city should be spilt to him, not to their own revenge;

and that the treasure should be reserved for his use, not for theirs. Who but a miscreant can grudge that God should serve himself of his own? I cannot blame the rest of Israel, if they were well pleased with their conditions; only one Achan troubles the peace, and his sin is imputed to Israel. The innocence of so many thousand Israelites is not so forcible to excuse his one sin, as his one sin is to taint all Israel.

A lewd man is a pernicious creature; that he damns his own soul, is the least part of his mischief; he commonly draws vengeance upon a thousand, either by the desert of his sin, or by the infection. Who would not have hoped that the same God, which for ten righteous men would have spared the five wicked cities, should not have been content to drown one sin in the obedience of so many righteous? But so venomous is sin, especially when it lights among God's people, that one drachm of it is able to infect the whole mass of Israel.

O righteous people of Israel, that had but one Achan! How had their late circumcision cut away the unclean foreskin of their disobedience! How had the blood of their paschal lamb scoured their souls from covetous desires! The world was well mended with them, since their stubborn murmurings in the desert. Since the death of Moses, and the government of Joshua, I do not find them in any disorder. After that the law hath brought us under the conduct of the true Jesus, our sins are more rare, and ourselves are more conscionable. While we are under the law, we do not so keep it, as when we are delivered from it; our Christian freedom is more holy than our servitude. Then have the sacraments of God their due effect, when their receipt purgeth us from our old sins, and makes our conversation clean and spiritual.

Litle did Joshua know that there was any sacrilege committed by Israel. That sin is not half cunning enough, that hath not learned secrecy. Joshua was a vigilant leader, yet some sins will escape him. Only that eye which is every where, finds us out in our close wickedness. It is no blame to authority, that some sins are secretly committed: the holiest congregation or family may be blemished with some malefactors. It is just blame, that open sins are not punished: we shall wrong government, if we shall expect the reach of it should be infinite. He therefore, which, if he had known the offence, would have sent up prayers and tears to God, now sends spies for a further discovery of Ai; they return with news of the weakness of their adversaries; and, as contemning their paucity, persuade Joshua that a wing of Israel is enough to overshadow this city of Ai. The Israelites were so flushed with their former victory, that now they think no walls or men can stand before them. Good success lifts up the heart with too much confidence; and, while it dissuades men from doing their best, ofttimes disappoints them. With God, the mean can never be too weak; without him, never strong enough.

It is not good to contemn an impotent enemy. In this second battle, the Israelites are beaten. It was not the fewness of their assailants that overthrew them, but the sin that lay lurking at home. If all the host of Israel had set upon this poor village of Ai, they had been all equally discomfited: the wedge of Achan did more fight against them, than all the swords of the Canaanites. The victories of God go not by strength, but by innocence.

Doubtless these men of Ai insulted in this foil of Israel, and said, Lo, these are the men, from whose presence the waters of Jordan ran back; now they run as fast away from ours. These are they, before whom the walls of Jericho fell down; now they are fallen as fast before us. And all their neighbours took heart from this victory. Wherein, I doubt not, but, besides the punishment of Israel's sin, God intended the further obduration of the Canaanites: like as some skilful player loses on purpose at the beginning of the game, to draw on the more abetments. The news of their overthrow spread as far as the fame of their speed; and every city of Canaan could say, Why not we as well as Ai?

But good Joshua, that succeeded Moses, no less in the care of God's glory than in his government, is much dejected with this event. He rends his clothes, falls on his face, casts dust upon his head, and, as if he had learned of his master how to expostulate with God, says, "What wilt thou do to thy mighty name?"

That Joshua might see God took no pleasure to let the Israelites lie dead upon the earth before their enemies, himself is taxed for but lying all day, upon his face, before the ark. All his expostulations are answered in one word, "Get thee up, Israel hath sinned." I do not hear God say, Lie still, and mourn for the sin of Israel. It is to no purpose to pray against punishment, while the sin continues. And though God loves to be sued to, yet he holds our requests unseasonable, till there be care had of satisfaction. When we have risen, and redressed sin, then may we fall down for pardon.

Victory is in the free hand of God, to dispose where he will; and no man can marvel, that the dice of war run ever with hasard on both sides: so as God needed not to have given any other reason of this discomfiture of Israel, but his own pleasure; yet Joshua must now know, that Israel, which before prevailed for their faith, is beaten for their sin. When we are crossed in just and holy quarrels, we may well think there is some secret evil, unrepented of, which God would punish in us; which, though we see not, yet he so hates, that he will rather be wanting to his own cause, than not revenge it. When we go about any enterprise of God, it is good to see that our hearts be clear from any pollution of sin; and when we are thwarted in our hopes, it is our best course to ransack ourselves, and to search for some sin hid from us in our bosom, but open to the view of God.

The oracle of God, which told him a great offence was committed, yet reveals not the person. It had been as easy for him to have named the man, as the crime. Neither doth Joshua request it; but refers that discovery to such a means, as whereby the offender, finding himself singled out by the lot, might be most convinced. Achan thought he might have lain as close in all that throng of Israel, as the wedge of gold lay in his tent. The same hope of secrecy, which moved him to sin, moved him to confidence in his sin: but now, when he saw the lot fall upon his tribe, he began to start a little; when upon his family, he began to change countenance; when upon his household, to tremble and fear; when upon his person, to be utterly confounded in himself. Foolish men think to run away with their privy sins, and say, Tush, no eye shall see me; but, when they think themselves safest, God pulls them out with shame. The man that hath escaped justice, and now is lying down in death, would think, My shame shall never be disclosed; but, before men and angels, shall he be brought on the scaffold, and find confusion, as sure as late.

What needed any other evidence, when God had accused Achan? Yet Joshua will have the sin out of his mouth, in whose heart it was hatched; "My son, I beseech thee, give glory to God." Whom God had convinced as a malefactor, Joshua beseeches as a son. Some hot spirit would have said, Thou wretched traitor, how hast thou pilfered from thy God, and shed the blood of so many Israelites, and caused the host of Israel to show their backs, with dishonour, to the heathen? Now shall we fetch this sin out of thee with tortures, and plague thee with a condign death. But, like the disciple of Him whose servant he was, he meekly entreats that which he might have extorted by violence, "My son, I beseech thee." Sweetness of compellation is a great help towards the good entertainment of an admonition: roughness and rigour many times harden those hearts, which meekness would have melted to repentance. Whether we sue, or convince, or reprove, little good is gotten by bitterness. Detestation of the sin may well stand with favour to the person; and these two not distinguished, cause great wrong, either in our charity or justice; for either we uncharitably hate the creature of God, or unjustly affect the evil of men. Subjects are, as they are called, sons to the magistrate. All Israel was not only of the family, but as of the loins of Joshua. Such must be the corrections, such the provisions of governors, as for their children; as again, the obedience and love of subjects must be filial.

God has glorified himself sufficiently, in finding out the wickedness of Achan; neither need he honour from men, much less from sinners. They can dishonour him by their iniquities; but what recompense can they give him for their wrongs? Yet Joshua says, "My son, give glory to God." Israel should now see, that the tongue of Achan did justify God in his lot. The confession of our sins doth no less honour God, than his glory is blemished by their commission. Who would not be glad to redeem the honour of his Redeemer, with his own shame!

The lot of God, and the mild words of Joshua, won Achan to accuse himself, ingenuously, impartially. A storm, perhaps, would not have done that which a sunshine had done. If Achan had come in uncalled, and, before any question made, out of an honest remorse, had brought in his sacrilegious booty, and cast himself and it at the foot of Joshua, doubtless Israel had prospered, and his sin had carried away pardon; now he hath gotten thus much thank, that he is not a desperate sinner. God will once wring from the conscience of wicked men their own indictments; they have not more carefully hid their sin, than they shall one day freely proclaim their own shame.

Achan's confession, though it were late, yet was it free and full: for he doth not only acknowledge the act, but the ground of his sin— "I saw, and coveted, and took." The eye betrayed the heart, and that the hand; and now all conspire in the offence. If we list not to flatter ourselves, this hath been the order of our crimes. Evil is uniform; and, beginning at the senses, takes the inmost fort of the soul, and then arms our own outward forces against us. This shall once be the lascivious man's song, "I saw, and coveted, and took;" this the thief's, this the idolater's, this the glutton's and drunkard's: all these receive their death by the eye. But, O foolish Achan, with what eyes didst thou look upon that spoil, which thy fellows saw and contemned! Why couldst thou not before, as well as now, see shame hid under that gay Babylonish garment? and a heap of stones covered with those shekels of silver? The over-prizing and over-desiring of these earthly things, carries us into all mischief, and hides from us the sight of God's judgments. Whosoever desires the glory of metals, or of gay clothes, or honour, cannot be innocent.

Well might Joshua have proceeded to the execution of him, whom God and his own mouth accused: but, as one that thought no evidence could be too strong, in a case that was capital, he sends to see whether there was as much truth in the confession, as there was falsehood in the stealth. Magistrates and judges must pace slowly and sure in the punishment of offenders. Presumptions are not ground enough for the sentence of death; no, not, in some cases, the confessions of the guilty. It is no warrant for the law to wrong a man, that he hath before wronged himself. There is less ill in sparing an offender, than in punishing the innocent.

Who would not have expected, since the confession of Achan was ingenuous, and his pillage still found entire, that his life should have been pardoned? But here was, Confess and die: he had been too long sick of this disease, to be recovered. Had his confession been speedy and free, it had saved him. How dangerous it is to suffer sin to lie fretting into the soul! which, if it were washed off betimes with our repentance, could not kill us. In mortal offences, the course of human justice is not stayed by our penitence. It is well for our souls that we have repented; but the laws of men take not notice of our sorrow. I know not whether the death, or the tears of a malefactor, be a better sight. The censures of the church are wiped off with weeping, not the penalties of laws.

Neither is Achan alone called forth to death, but all his family, all his substance. The actor alone doth not smart with sacrilege; all that concerns him is enwrapped in the judgment. Those that defile their hands with holy goods, are enemies to their own flesh and blood. God's first revenges are so much the more fearful, because they must be exemplary.

CONTEMPLATION V.—THE GIBEONITES.

THE news of Israel's victory had flown over all the mountains and valleys of Canaan; and yet those heathenish kings and people are mustered together against them. They might have seen themselves in Jericho and Ai, and have well perceived it was not an arm of flesh that they must resist; yet they gather their forces and say, Tush, we shall speed better. It is madness in a man not to be warned, but to run upon the point of those judgments wherewith he sees others miscarry, and not to believe till he cannot recover. Our assent is purchased too late, when we have overstayed prevention, and trust to that experience which we cannot live to redeem.

Only the Hivites are wiser than their fellows, and will rather yield and live. Their intelligence was not diverse from the rest; all had equally heard of the miraculous conduct and success of Israel: but their resolution was diverse. As Rahab saved her family in the midst of Jericho, so these four cities preserved themselves in the midst of Canaan: and both of them by believing what God would do. The efficacy of God's marvellous works is not in the acts themselves, but in our apprehension: some are overcome with those motives which others have contemned for weak.

Had these Gibeonites joined with the forces of all their neighbours' they had perished in their common slaughter; if they had not gone away by themselves, death had met them. It may have more pleasure, it cannot have so much safety, to follow the multitude. If examples may lead us, the greatest part shuts out God upon earth, and is excluded from God elsewhere. Some few poor Hivites yield to the church of God, and escape the condemnation of the world. It is very like their neighbours flouted at this base submission of the Gibeonites; and, out of their terms of honour, scorned to beg life of an enemy, while they were out of the 'compass of mercy; but, when the bodies of these proud Jebusites and Perizites lay strewed upon the earth, and the Gibeonites survived, whether was more worthy of scorn and insultation?

If the Gibeonites had stayed till Israel had besieged their cities, their yieldance had been fruitless: now they make an early peace and are preserved. There is no wisdom in staying till a judgment come home to us; the only way to avoid it, is to meet it half way. There is the same remedy of war and of danger. To provoke an enemy in his own borders is the best stay of invasion; and to solicit God betimes, in a manifest danger, is the best antidote for death.

I commend their wisdom in seeking peace; I do not commend their falsehood in the manner of seeking it: who can look for any better of Pagans! But as the faith of Rahab is so rewarded, that her lie is not punished, so the fraud of these Gibeonites is not an equal match of their belief, since the name of the Lord God of Israel brought them to this suit of peace.

Nothing is found fitter to deceive God's people, than a counterfeit copy of age. Here are old sacks, old bottles, old shoes, old garments, old bread. The Israelites, that had worn one suit forty years, seemed new clad in comparison of them. It is no new policy, that Satan would beguile us with a vain colour of antiquity, clothing falsehood in rags. Errors are never the elder for their patching. Corruption can do the same that time would do. We may make age as well as suffer it. These Gibeonites did tear their bottles and shoes, and clothes, and made them naught, that they might seem old: so do the false patrons of new errors. If we be caught with this Gibeonite stratagem, it is a sign we have not consulted with God.

The sentence of death was gone out against all the inhabitants of Canaan. These Hivites acknowledge the truth and judgments of God, and yet seek to escape by a league with Israel. The general denunciations of the vengeance of God enwrap all sinners; yet may we not despair of mercy. If the secret counsel of the Almighty had not designed these men to live, Joshua could not have been deceived with their league. In the generality there is no hope. Let us come, in the old rags of our vileness, to the true Joshua, and make our truce with him: we may live, yea, we shall live. Some of the Israelites suspect the fraud; and, notwithstanding all their old garments and provisions, can say, "It may be thou dwellest amongst us." If Joshua had continued this doubt, the Gibeonites had torn their bottles in vain. In cases and persons unknown, it is safe not to be too credulous. Charity itself will allow suspicion, where we have seen no cause to trust.

If these Hivites had not put on new faces with their old clothes, they had surely changed countenance when they heard this argument of the Israelites, "It may be thou dwellest amongst us; how then can I make a league with thee?" They had, perhaps, hoped their submission would not have been refused, wheresoever they had dwelt: but, lest their neighbourhood might be a prejudice, they come disguised; and now hear, that their nearness of abode was an unremovable bar of peace. It was quarrel enough that they were Canaanites: God had forbidden both the league and the life of the native inhabitants. He that calls himself the God of peace, proclaims himself the God of hosts: and not to fight where he hath commanded, is to break the peace with God, while we nourish it with men. Contention with brethren is not more hateful to him, than leagues with idolaters. The condition that he hath set to our peace, is our possibility and power: that falls not within the possibility of our power, which we cannot do lawfully.

What a smooth tale did these Gibeonites tell for themselves, of the remoteness of their country, the motives of their journey, the consultation of their elders, the ageing of their provisions by the way: that it might seem not only safe, but deserved on their parts, that they should be admitted to a peace so far sought, and purchased with so much toil and importunity. Their clothes and their tongues agreed together; and both disagree from the truth. Deceit is ever lightly wrapped up in plausibility of words; as fair faces oftentimes hide much unchastity. But this guile sped the better, because it was clad with much plainness: for who would have suspected, that clouted shoes and ragged coats could have covered so much subtilty? The case seemed so clear, that the Israelites thought it needless to consult with the mouth of the Lord. Their own eyes and ears were called only to counsel; and now their credulity hath drawn them into inconvenience.

There is no way to convince the Gibeonitish pretences of antiquity, but to have recourse to the oracle of God. Had this been advised with, none of these false rags had shamed the church of God. Whether in our practice or judgment, this direction cannot fail; whereas what we take upon the words of men proves ever either light or false wares.

The facility of Israel had led them into a league, to an oath, for the safety of the Gibeonites: and now, within three days, they find both their neighbourhood and deceit. Those old shoes of theirs would easily hold to carry them back to their home. The march of a great army is easy; yet within three days the Israelites were before their cities. Joshua might now have taken advantage of their own words, to dissolve his league, and have said, Ye are come from a far country, these cities are near: these are not therefore the people to whom we are engaged by our promise and oath; and if these cities be yours, yet ye are not yourselves. Erewhile we were strangers, now ye are Hivites born, and dwelling in the midst of Canaan: we will therefore destroy these cities near hand, and do you save your people afar off. It would seem very questionable, whether Joshua needed to hold himself bound to this oath; for fraudulent conventions oblige not; and Israel had put in a direct caveat of their vicinity: yet dare not Joshua and the princes trust to shifts, for the eluding their oath, but must faithfully perform what they have rashly promised.

Joshua's heart was clear from any intention of a league with a Canaanite, when he gave his oath to these disguised strangers: yet he durst neither repeal it himself, neither do I hear him sue to Eleazar the high-priest to dispense with it, but takes himself tied to the very strict words of his oath, not to his own purpose. His tongue had bound his heart and hands, so as neither might stir; lest, while he was curious of fulfilling the word of God, he should violate the oath of God. And if the Gibeonites had not known these holy bonds indissoluble, they neither had been so importunate to obtain their vow, nor durst they have trusted it, being obtained. If either dispensation with oaths, or equivocation in oaths, had been known in the world, or at least approved, these Gibeonites had not lived, and Israel had slain them without sin. Either Israel wanted skill, or our reservers honesty.

The multitude of Israel, when they came to the walls of these four exempted cities, itched to be at the spoil. Not out of a desire to fulfil God's commandment, but to enrich themselves, would they have fallen upon these Hivites: they thought all lost that fell beside their fingers. The wealthy city of Jericho was first altogether interdicted them; the walls and houses either fell or must be burnt, the men and cattle killed, the goods and treasure confiscate to God. Achan's booty shows, that that city was both rich and proud; yet Israel might be no whit the better for them, carrying away nothing but empty victory: and now four other cities must be exempted from their pillage. Many an envious look did Israel therefore cast upon these walls; and many bitter words did they cast out against their princes, the enemies of their gain, whether for swearing, or for that they would not forswear. But, howsoever, the princes might have said, in a return to their fraud, We swore indeed to you, but not to the people; yet, if any Israelite had but pulled down one stone from their walls, or shed one drop of Gibeonitish blood, he had no less plagued all Israel for perjury than Achan had before plagued them for sacrilege. The sequel shows how God would have taken it; for when, three hundred years after, Saul (perhaps forgetting the vow of his forefathers) slew some of these Gibeonites, although out of a well-meant zeal, all Israel smarted for the fact, with a three years' famine, and that in David's reign, who received this oracle from God; "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." Neither could this wrong be expiated, but by the blood of Saul's seven sons, hanged up at the very court gates of their father.

Joshua and the princes had promised them life, they promised them not liberty: no covenant was passed against their servitude. It was just therefore with the rulers of Israel, to make slavery the price both of their lives and their deceit. The Israelites had themselves been drudges, if the Gibeonites had not beguiled them and lived. The old rags therefore, wherewith they came disguised, must now be their best suits, and their life must be toilsomely spent in hewing of wood, and drawing of water for all Israel. How dear is life to our nature, that men can be content to purchase it with servitude! It is the wisdom of God's children to make good use of their oversights. The rash oath of Israel proves their advantage. Even wicked men gain by the outside of good actions; good men make a benefit of their sins.

BOOK IX.

CONTEMPLATION I.—THE RESCUE OF GIBEON.

The life of the Gibeonites must cost them servitude from Israel, and dangers from their neighbours. If Joshua will but sit still, the deceit of the Gibeonites shall be revenged by his enemies. Five kings are up in arms against them, and are ready to pay their fraud with violence. What should these poor men do? If they make not their peace they die by strangers; if they do make their peace with foreigners they must die by neighbours. There is no course that threatens not some danger. We have sped well, if our choice hath light upon the easiest inconvenience.

If these Hivites have sinned against God, against Israel; yet what have they done to their neighbours? I hear of no treachery, no secret information, no attempt. I see no sin but their league with Israel, and their life; yet, for ought we find, they were free men, no way either obliged or obnoxious. As Satan, so wicked men cannot abide to lose any of their community. If a convert come home, the angels welcome him with songs, the devils follow him with uproar and fury, his old partners with scorns and obloquy.

I find these neighbour princes half dead with fear, and yet they can find time to be sick of envy. Malice in a wicked heart is the king of passions: all other vail and bow when it comes in place. Even their own life was not so dear to them as revenge. Who would not rather have looked that these kings should have tried to have followed the copy of this league? Or, if their fingers did itch to fight, why did they not rather think of a defensive war against Israel, than an offensive against the Gibeonites? Gibeon was strong, and would not be won without blood; yet these Amorites which at their best were too weak for Israel, would spend their forces before-hand on their neighbours. Here was a strong hatred in weak breasts; they feared, and yet began to fight; they feared Israel, yet began to fight with Gibeon. If they had sat still, their destruction had not been so sudden. The malice of the wicked hastens the pace of their own judgment. No rod is so fit for a mischievous man as his own.

Gibeon and these other cities of the Hivites, had no king; and none yielded and escaped but they. Their elders consulted before for their league; neither is there any challenge sent to the king, but to the city. And now these five kings of the Amorites have unjustly compacted against them. Sovereignty abused is a great spur to courage. The conceit of authority, in great persons, many times lies in the way of their own safety, while it will not let them stoop to the ordinary courses of inferiors. Hence it is, that heaven is peopled with so few great ones. Hence it is, that true contentment seldom dwells high, while meaner men of humble spirits enjoy both earth and heaven.

The Gibeonites had well proved, that though they wanted a head, yet they wanted not wit; and now the same wit that won Joshua and Israel to their friendship and protection, teacheth them to make use of those they had won. If they had not more trusted Joshua than their walls, they had never stolen that league; and when should they have use of their new protectors, but now that they were assailed? Whither should we fly, but to our Joshua, when the powers of darkness, like mighty Amorites, have besieged us? If ever we will send up our prayers to him, it will be when we are beleaguered with evils. If we trust to our own resistance, we cannot stand; we cannot miscarry, if we trust to his. In vain shall we send to our Joshua in these straits, if we have not before come to him in our freedom.

Which of us would not have thought Joshua had a good pretence for his forbearance, and have said, You have stolen your league with me; why do you expect help from him whom ye have deceived? All that we promised you was a sufferance to live. Enjoy what we promised, we will not take your life from you. Hath your faithfulness deserved to expect more than our covenant? We never promised to hazard our lives for you, to give you life with the loss of our own. But that good man durst not construe his own covenant to such an advantage. He knew little difference betwixt killing them with his own sword, and the sword of an Amorite: whosoever should give the blow, the murder would be his. Even permission, in those things we may remedy, makes us no less actors, than consent. Some men kill as much by looking on, as others by smiting. We are guilty of all the evil we might have hindered.

The noble disposition of Joshua, besides his engagement, will not let him forsake his new vassals: their confidence in him is argument enough to draw him into the field. The greatest obligation to a good mind is another's trust; which to disappoint, were mercilessly perfidious. How much less shall our true Joshua fail the confidence of our faith! O my Saviour, if we send the messengers of our prayers to thee into thy Gilgal, thy mercy binds thee to relief. Never any soul miscarried that trusted thee. We may be wanting in our trust, our trust can never want success.

Speed in bestowing, doubles a gift; a benefit deferred, loses the thanks, and proves unprofitable. Joshua marches all night, and fights all day for the Gibeonites. They took not so much pains in coming to deceive him, as he in going to deliver them. It is the noblest victory to overcome evil with good. If his very Israelites had been in danger, he could have done no more. God and his Joshua, make no difference betwixt Gibeonites Israelited, and his own natural people. All are Israelites whom he hath taken to league. We, strangers of the Gentiles, are now the true Jews. God never did more for the natural olive, than for that wild imp which he had graffed in. And as these Hivites could never be thankful enough to such a Joshua, no more can we to so gracious a Redeemer, who, forgetting our unworthiness, descended to our Gibeon, and rescued us from the powers of hell and death.

Joshua fought, but God discomfited the Amorites. The praise is to the workman, not to the instrument. Neither did God slay them only with Joshua's sword, but with his own hail-stones; that now the Amorites may see both these revenges come from one hand. These bullets of God do not wound but kill. It is no wonder that these five kings fly; they may soon run away from their hope, never from their horror. If they look behind, there is the sword of Israel, which they dare not turn upon, because God had taken their heart from them, before their life: if they look upwards, there is the hail-shot of God fighting against them out of heaven, which they can neither resist nor avoid.

If they had no enemy but Israel, they might hope to run away from death, since fear is a better footman than desire of revenge; but now, whithersoever they run, heaven will be about their heads. And now, all the reason that is left them, in this confusion of their thoughts, is to wish themselves well dead. There is no evasion, where God intends a revenge. We men have devised to imitate these instruments of death, and send forth deadly bullets out of a cloud of smoke; wherein yet as there is much danger, so much uncertainty; but this God that discharges his ordnance from heaven, directs every shot to a head, and can as easily kill as shoot. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." He hath more ways of vengeance than he hath creatures. The same heaven that sent forth water to the old world, fire to the Sodomites, lightning and thunder-bolts to the Egyptians, sends out hail-stones to the Amorites. It is a good care how we may not anger God; it is a vain study how we may fly from his judgments, when we have angered him; if we could run out of the world, even there shall we find his revenges far greater.

Was it not miracle enough that God did brain their adversaries from heaven, but that the sun and moon must stand still in heaven! It is not enough that the Amorites fly, but that the greatest planets of heaven must stay their own course, to witness and wonder at the discomfiture. For him, which gave them both being and motion, to bid them stand still, it seems no difficulty, although the rareness would deserve admiration; but for a man to command the chief stars of heaven (by whose influence he liveth,) as the centurion would do his servant (sun, stay in Gibeon, and moon, stand still in Ajalon), it is more than a wonder. It was not Joshua, but his faith that did this; not by way of precept, but of prayer: if I may not say, that the request of a faithful man, as we say of the great, commands. God's glory was that which Joshua aimed at: he knew that all the world must needs be witnesses of that which the eye of the world stood still to see. Had he respected but the slaughter of the Amorites, he knew the hail-stones could do that alone; the sun needed not stand still to direct that cloud to persecute them: but the glory of the slaughter was sought by Joshua, that he might send that up whence those hail-stones and that victory came. All the earth might see the sun and moon, all could not see the cloud of hail, which because of that heavy burden flew but low. That all nations might know the same hand commands both in earth, in the clouds, in heaven, Joshua now prays, that he, which disheartened his enemies upon earth, and smote them from the cloud, would stay the sun and moon in heaven. God never got himself so much honour by one day's work, amongst the heathen; and when was it more fit than now, when five heathen kings are joined against him?

The sun and the moon were the ordinary gods of the world; and who would not but think, that their standing still, but one hour, should be the ruin of nature? And now all nations shall well see, that there is a higher than their highest; that their gods are but servants to the God whom themselves should serve; at whose pleasure both they and nature shall stand at once. If that God which meant to work this miracle, had not raised up his thoughts to desire it, it had been a blameable presumption, which now is a faith worthy of admiration. To desire a miracle, without cause, is a tempting of God. O powerful God, that can effect this! O power of faith, that can obtain it! What is there that God cannot do? and what is there which God can do, that faith cannot do?

CONTEMPLATION II.—THE ALTAR OF THE REUBENITES.

Reuben and Gad were the first that had an inheritance assigned them, yet they must enjoy it last. So it oft falls out in the heavenly Canaan, the first in title are last in possession. They had their lot assigned them beyond Jordan; which, though it were allotted them in peace, must be purchased with their war: that must be done for their brethren, which needed not be done for themselves. They must yet still fight, and fight foremost, that, as they had the first patrimony, they might endure the first encounter. I do not hear them say, This is our share, let us sit down and enjoy it quietly, fight who will for the rest: but, when they knew their own portion, they leave wives and children to take possession, and march armed before their brethren, till they had conquered all Canaan. Whether should we more commend their courage or their charity? Others were moved to fight with hope, they only with love: they could not win more, they might lose themselves; yet they will fight, both for that they had something, and that their brethren might have. Thankfulness and love can do more with God's children, than desire to merit or necessity. No true Israelite can (if he might choose) abide to sit still beyond Jordan, when all his brethren are in the field. Now, when all this war of God was ended, and all Canaan is both won and divided, they return to their own; yet not till they were dismissed by Joshua. All the sweet attractives of their private love cannot hasten their pace. If heaven be never so sweet to us, yet may we not run from this earthen warfare, till our great Captain shall please to discharge us. If these Reubenites had departed sooner, they had been recalled, if not as cowards, surely as fugitives; now they are sent back with victory and blessing. How safe and happy it is to attend both the call and the despatch of God!

Being returned in peace to their home, their first care is not for trophies, nor for houses, but for an altar to God; an altar, not for sacrifice, which had been abominable, but for a memorial what God they served. The first care of true Israelites must be the safety of religion. The world, as it is inferior in worth, so must it be in respect. He never knew God aright, that can abide any competition with his Maker.

The rest of the tribes no sooner hear news of their new altar, but they gather to Shiloh to fight against them. They had scarce breathing from the Canaanitish war, and now they will go fight with their brethren: if their brethren will, as they suspected, turn idolatres, they cannot hold them any other than Canaanites. The Reubenites and their fellows had newly settled the rest of Israel in their possessions; and now, ere they can be warm in their seats, Israel is up in arms to thrust them out of their own. The hatred of their suspected idolatry makes them forget either their blood, or their benefits. Israel says, These men were the first in our battles, and shall be the first in our revenge; they fought well for us, we will try how they can fight for themselves. What if they were our champions? their revolt from God hath lost them the thank of their former labours; their idolatry shall make them, of brethren, adversaries; their own blood shall give handsel to their new altar. O noble and religious zeal of Israel! Who would think these men the sons of them that danced about the molten calf? that consecrated an altar to that idol? Now they are ready to die or kill, rather than endure an altar without an idol. Every overture, in matter of religion, is worthy of suspicion, worthy of our speedy opposition. God looks for an early redress of the first beginnings of impiety. As in treasons or mutinies, wise statesmen find it safest to kill the serpent in the egg; so, in motions of spiritual alterations, one spoonful of water will quench that fire at first, which afterwards whole buckets cannot abate.

Yet do not these zealous Israelites run rashly and furiously upon their brethren, nor say, What need we expostulate? the fact is clear: what care we for words, when we see their altar? What can this mean, but either service to a false god, or division in the service of the true? There can be no excuse for so manifest a crime: why do we not rather think of punishment than satisfaction? But they send ere they go, and consult ere they execute. Phineas the son of Eleazar the priest, and ten princes, for every tribe one, are addressed both to inquire and dissuade; to inquire of the purpose of the fact, to dissuade from that which they imagined was purposed. Wisdom is a good guide to zeal, and only can keep it from running out into fury. If discretion do not hold in the reins, good intentions will both break their own necks, and the riders: yea, which is strange, without this, the zeal of God may lead us from God.

Not only wisdom, but charity moved them to this message. For, grant they had been guilty, must they perish unwarned? Peaceable means must first be used to recall them, ere violence be sent to persecute them. The old rule of Israel hath been, still to inquire of Abel. No good shepherd sends his dog to pull out the throat of his strayed sheep, but rather fetches it on his shoulders to the fold. Sudden cruelty stands not with religion. He which will not himself break the bruised reed, how will he allow us either to bruise the whole, or to break the bruised, or to burn the broken!

Neither yet was here more charity in sending, than uncharitableness in the misconstruction. They begin with a challenge, and charge their brethren deeply with transgression, apostasy, rebellion. I know not how two contrary qualities fall into love; it is not naturally suspicious, and yet many times suggests jealous fears of those we affect. If these Israelites had not loved their brethren, they would never have sent so far to restrain them; they had never offered them part of their own patrimony: if they had not been excessively jealous, they had not censured a doubtful action so sharply. They met at Shiloh, where the tabernacle was; but if they had consulted with the ark of God, they had saved both this labour, and this challenge. This case seemed so plain, that they thought advice needless: their inconsiderateness therefore brands their brethren with crimes whereof they were innocent, and makes themselves the only offenders. In cases which are doubtful and uncertain, it is safe either to suspend the judgment, or to pass it in favour; otherwise, a plain breach of charity in us shall be worse than a questionable breach of justice in another.

Yet this little gleam of their uncharitable love began at themselves; if they had not feared their own judgments in the offence of Reuben, I know not whether they had been so vehement. The fearful revenges of their brethren's sin are still in their eye. The wickedness of Peor stretched not so far as the plague. Achan sinned, and Israel was beaten; therefore, by just induction, they argue, "Ye rebel to-day against the Lord; to-morrow will the Lord be wroth with all the congregation." They still tremble at the vengeance passed; and find it time to prevent their own punishment, in punishing their brethren. God's proceedings have then their right use, when they are both carefully remembered, and made patterns of what he may do.

Had these Reubenites been as hot in their answer, as the Israelites were in their charge, here had grown a bloody war out of misprision: but now their answer is mild and moderate, and such as well showed, that though they were further from the ark, yet no less near to God. They thought in themselves, This act of ours, though it were well meant by us, yet might well be, by interpretation, scandalous; it is reason our mildness should give satisfaction for that offence which we have not prevented. Hereupon their answer was as pleasing, as their act was dangerous. Even in those actions whereby an offence may be occasioned, though not given, charity binds us to clear both our own name, and the conscience of others.

Little did the Israelites look for so good a ground of an action so suspicious; an altar without a sacrifice; an altar and no tabernacle; an altar without a precept, and yet not against God. It is not safe to measure all men's actions by our own conceit, but rather to think there may be a further drift and warrant of their act, than we can attain to see.

By that time the Reubenites have commented upon their own work, it appears as justifiable, as before offensive. What wisdom and religion is found in that altar, which before showed nothing but idolatry! This discourse of theirs is full both of reason and piety; we are severed by the river Jordan from the other tribes, perhaps hereafter our choice may exclude us from Israel. Posterity may peradventure say, Jordan is the bounds of all natural Israelites, the streams whereof never gave way to those beyond the river: if they had been ours, either in blood or religion, they would not have been sequestered in habitation. Doubtless therefore these men are the offspring of some strangers, which, by vicinity of abode, have gotten some tincture of our language, manners, religion; what have we to do with them, what have they to do with the tabernacle of God? Since therefore we may not either remove God's altar to us, or remove our patrimony to the altar, the pattern of the altar shall go with us, not for sacrifice, but for memorial, that both the posterity of the other Israelites may know, we are no less derived from them, than this altar from theirs; and that our posterity may know, they pertain to that altar whereof this is the resemblance. There was no danger of the present; but posterity might both offer and receive prejudice, if this monument were not. It is a wise and holy care to prevent the dangers of ensuing times, and to settle religion upon the succeeding generations. As we affect to leave a perpetuity of our bodily issue, so much more to traduce piety with them. Do we not see good husbands set and plant those trees whereof their grand-children shall receive the first-fruit and shade? Why are we less thrifty in leaving true religion entire to our children's children?

CONTEMPLATION III.—EHUD AND EGLON.

As every man is guilty of his own sorrow, these Israelites bred mischief to themselves. It was their mercy that plagued them with those Canaanites, which their obedience should have rooted out. If foolish pity be a more humane sin, yet it is no less dangerous than cruelty. Cruelty kills others, unjust pity kills ourselves. They had been lords alone of the promised land, if their commiseration had not overswayed their justice; and now their enemies are too cruel to them, in the just revenge of God, because they were too merciful. That God, which in his revealed will had commanded all the Canaanites to the slaughter, yet secretly gives over Israel to a toleration of some Canaanites, for their own punishment. He hath bidden us cleanse our hearts of all our corruptions; yet he will permit some of these thorns still in our sides, for exercise, for humiliation. If we could lay violent hands upon our sins, our souls should have peace; now our indulgence costs us many stripes, and many tears. What a continued circle is here of sins, judgments, repentance, deliverances? The conversation with idolaters taints them with sin, their sin draws on judgment, the smart of the judgment moves them to repentance, upon their repentance follows speedy deliverance, upon their peace and deliverance they sin again.

Othniel, Caleb's nephew, had rescued them from idolatry and servitude; his life, and their innocence and peace, ended together. How powerful the presence of one good man is in a church or state, is best found in his loss.

A man that is at once eminent in place and goodness, is like a stake in a hedge; pull that up, and all the rest are but loose and rotten sticks easily removed: or like the pillar of a vaulted roof; which either supports or ruins the building. Who would not think idolatry an absurd and unnatural thing? which as it hath the fewest inducements, so had also the most direct inhibitions from God; and yet after all these warnings, Israel falls into it again. Neither affliction nor repentance can secure an Israelite from redoubling the worst sin, if he be left to his own frailty. It is no censuring of the truth of our present sorrow, by the event of a following miscarriage. The former cries of Israel to God were unfeigned, yet their present wickedness is abominable. "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall."

No sooner had he said, Israel had rest, but he adds, They committed wickedness. The security of any people is the cause of their corruption. Standing waters soon grow noisome. While they were exercised with war, how scrupulous were they of the least intimation of idolatry! The news of a bare altar beyond Jordan drew them together for a revenge: now they are at peace with their enemies, they are at variance with God. It is both hard and happy not to be the worse with liberty. The sedentary life is most subject to diseases.

Rather than Israel shall want a scourge for their sin, God himself shall raise them up an enemy. Moab had no quarrel but his own ambition; but God meant by the ambition of the one part, to punish the idolatry of the other: his justice can make one sin the execution of another, whilst neither shall look for any other measure from him but judgment. The evil of the city is so his, that the instrument is not guiltless. Before, God had stirred up the king of Syria against Israel; now, the king of Moab; afterwards, the king of Canaan. He hath more variety of judgments, than there can be offences. If we have once made him our adversary, he shall be sure to make us adversaries enough, which shall revenge his quarrel whilst they prosecute their own.

Even those were idolaters, by whose hands God plagued the idolatries of Israel. In Moab, the same wickedness prospers, which in God's own people is punished. The justice of the Almighty can least brook evil in his own. The same heathen which provoked Israel to sin, shall scourge them for sinning. Our very profession hurts us, if we be not innocent.

No less than eighteen years did the road of Moab rest upon the inheritance of God. Israel seems as born to servitude; they came from their bondage in the land of Egypt to serve in the land of promise. They had neglected God, now they are neglected of God; their sins have made them servants, whom the choice of God had made free, yea his first-born. Worthy are they to serve those men, whose false gods they had served, and to serve them always in thraldom, whom they have once served in idolatry. We may not measure the continuance of punishment by the time of the commission of sin; one minute's sin deserves a torment beyond all time.

Doubtless Israel was not so insensible of their own misery, as not to complain sooner than the end of eighteen years. The first hour they sighed for themselves, but now they cried unto God. The very purpose of affliction is to make us importunate. He hears the secret murmurs of our grief; yet will not seem to hear us, till our cries be loud and strong. God sees it best to let the penitent dwell for the time under their sorrows; he sees us sinking all the while, yet he lets us alone, till we be at the bottom: and when once we can say, "Out of the depths have I cried to thee;" instantly follows, "The Lord heard me." A vehement suitor cannot but be heard of God, whatsoever he asks. If our prayers want success, they want heart; their blessing is according to their vigour. We live in bondage to these spiritual Moabites, our own corruptions. It discontents us: but where are our strong cries unto the God of heavens? where are our tears? If we could passionately bemoan ourselves in him, how soon should we be more than conquerors? Some good motions we have to send up to him, but they faint in the way. We may call long enough, if we cry not to him.

The same hand that raised up Eglon against Israel, raised up also Ehud for Israel against Eglon. When that tyrant hath revenged God of his people, God will revenge his people of him. It is no privilege to be an instrument of God's vengeance by evil means. Though Eglon were an usurper, yet had Ehud been a traitor if God had not sent him. It is only in the power of him that makes kings, when they are once settled, to depose them. It is no more possible for our modern butchers of princes, to show they are employed by God, than to escape the revenge of God, in offering to do this violence, not being employed.

What a strange choice doth God make of an executioner? A man wanting of his right hand: either he had but one hand, or used but one, and that the worse, and the more unready. Who would not have thought both hands too little for such a work, or, if either might have been spared, how much rather the left? "God seeth not as man seeth." It is the ordinary way of the Almighty to make choice of the unlikeliest means. The instruments of God must not be measured by their own power or aptitude, but by the will of the agent. Though Ehud had no hands, he that employed him had enabled him to this slaughter. In human things, it is good to look to the means: in divine to the worker. No means are to be contemned, that God will use: no means to be trusted, that man will use without him.

It is good to be suspicious, where is least show of danger, and most appearance of favour. This left-handed man comes with a present in his hand, but a dagger under his skirt. The tyrant, besides service, looked for gifts; and now receives death in his bribe: neither God nor men do always give where they love. How oft doth God give extraordinary illumination, power of miracles, besides wealth and honour, where he hates! So do men too oft accompany their curses with presents: either lest an enemy should hurt us, or that we may hurt them. The intention is the favour in gifts, and not the substance.

Ehud's faith supplies the want of his hand. Where God intends success, he lifts up the heart with resolutions of courage and contempt of danger. What indifferent beholder of this project would not have condemned it, as unlikely to speed: to see a maimed man go alone to a great king, in the midst of all his troops: to single him out from all witnesses; to set upon him with one hand in his own parlour, where his courtiers might have heard the least exclamation, and have come in, if not to the rescue, yet to the revenge! Every circumstance is full of improbabilities. Faith evermore overlooks the difficulties of the way, and bends her eyes only to the certainty of the end. In this intestine slaughter of our tyrannical corruptions, when we cast our eyes upon ourselves, we might well despair. Alas, what can our left hands do against these spiritual wickednesses! But, when we see who hath both commanded and undertaken to prosper those holy designs, how can we misdoubt the success! "I can do all things through him that strengthens me."

When Ehud had obtained the convenient secrecy both of the weapon and place, now with a confident forehead he approaches the tyrant, and salutes him with a true and awful preface to so important an act. "I have a message to thee from God." Even Ehud's poniard was God's message: not only the vocal admonitions, but also the real judgments of God, are his errands to the world. He speaks to us in rain and waters, in sicknesses and famine, in unseasonable times and inundations: these are the secondary messages of God; if we will not hear the first, we must hear these to our cost.

I cannot but wonder at the devout reverence of this heathen prince. He sat in his chair of state; the unwieldiness of his fat body was such, that he could not rise with readiness and ease; yet no sooner doth he hear news of a message from God, but he rises up from his throne, and reverently attends the tenor thereof. Though he had no superior to control him, yet he cannot abide to be unmannerly in the business of God.

This man was an idolater, a tyrant; yet what outward respects doth he give to the true God? External ceremonies of piety, and compliments of devotion, may well be found with falsehood in religion. They are a good shadow of truth where it is; but where it is not, they are the very body of hypocrisy. He that had risen up in arms against God's people, and the true worship of God, now rises up in reverence to his name. God would have liked well to have had less of his courtesy, more of his obedience.

He looked to have heard the message with his ears, and he feels it in his guts; so sharp a message, that it pierced the body, and let out the soul through that unclean passage: neither did it admit of any answer but silence and death. In that part had he offended by pampering it, and making it his god; and now his bane finds the same way with his sin.

This one hard and cold morsel, which he cannot digest, pays for all those gluttonous delicates, whereof he had formerly surfeited. It is the manner of God to take fearful revenges of the professed enemies of his church.

It is a marvel, that neither any noise in his dying, nor the fall of so gross a body, called in some of his attendants: but that God, which hath intended to bring about any design, disposes of all circumstances to his own purpose. If Ehud had not come forth with a calm and settled countenance, and shut the doors after him, all his project had been in the dust. What had it been better that the king of Moab was slain, if Israel had neither had a messenger to inform, nor a captain to guide them? Now he departs peaceably, and blows a trumpet in Mount Ephraim, gathers Israel and falls upon the body of Moab, as well as he had done upon the head, and procures freedom to his people. He that would undertake great enterprises, had need of wisdom and courage; wisdom to contrive, and courage to execute; wisdom to guide his courage, and courage to second his wisdom: both which, if they meet with a good cause, cannot but succeed.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—JAEL AND SISERA.

It is no wonder if they, who, ere fourscore days after the law delivered, fell to idolatry alone; now, after fourscore years since the law restored, fell to idolatry among the Canaanites. Peace could in a shorter time work looseness in any people. And if, forty years after Othniel's deliverance, they relapsed, what marvel is it, that, in twice forty after Ehud, they thus miscarried? What are they the better to have killed Eglon the king of Moab, if the idolatry of Moab have killed them? The sin of Moab shall be found a worse tyrant than their Eglon. Israel is for every market; they sold themselves to idolatry, God sells them to the Canaanites: it is no marvel they are slaves, if they will be idolaters. After their longest intermission, they have now the sorest bondage. None of their tyrants were so potent as Jabin, with his nine hundred chariots of iron. The longer the reckoning is deferred, the greater is the sum. God provides on purpose mighty adversaries for his church, that their humiliation may be the greater in sustaining, and his glory may be greater in deliverance.

I do not find any prophet in Israel during their sin; but so soon as I hear news of their repentance, mention is made of a prophetess, and judge of Israel. There is no better sign of God's reconciliation, than the sending of his holy messengers to any people. He is not utterly fallen out with those whom he blesses with prophecy. Whom yet do I see raised to this honour?—not any of the princes of Israel; not Barak the captain; not Lapidoth the husband; but a woman, for the honour of her sex; a wife, for the honour of wedlock; Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth.

He, that had choice of all the millions of Israel, calls out two weak women to deliver his people; Deborah shall judge, Jael shall execute. All the palaces of Israel must yield to the palm-tree of Deborah: the weakness of the instruments redounds to the greater honour of the workman. Who shall ask God any reason of his elections, but his own pleasure? Deborah was to sentence, not to strike; to command, not to execute. This act is masculine, fit for some captain of Israel. She was the head of Israel; it was meet some other should be the hand. It is an imperfect and titular government, where there is a commanding power, without correction, without execution. The message of Deborah finds out Barak the son of Abinoam, in his obscure secrecy, and calls him from a corner of Naphtali to the honour of this exploit. He is sent for, not to get the victory, but to take it; not to overcome, but to kill; to pursue, and not to beat Sisera. Who could not have done this work, whereto not much courage, no skill, belonged? yet, even for this, will God have an instrument of his own choice. It is most fit that God should serve himself where he lists, of his own: neither is it to be inquired, whom we think meet for any employment, but whom God hath called.

Deborah had been no prophetess, if she durst have sent in her own name: her message is from him that sent herself, "Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded?" Barak's answer is faithful, though conditional; and doth not so much intend a refusal to go without her, as a necessary bond of her presence with him. Who can blame him that he would have a prophetess in his company? If the man had not been as holy as valiant, he would not have wished such society. How many think it a perpetual bondage to have a prophet of God at their elbow? God had never sent for him so far, if he could have been content to go up without Deborah: he knew that there was both a blessing and encouragement in that presence. It is no putting any trust in the success of those men that neglect the messengers of God.

To prescribe that to others, which we draw back from doing ourselves, is an argument of hollowness and falsity. Barak shall see that Deborah doth not offer him that cup whereof she dares not begin; without regard of her sex, she marches with him to Mount Tabor, and rejoices to be seen of the ten thousand of Israel. With what scorn did Sisera look at these gleanings of Israel! How unequal did this match seem, of ten thousand Israelites against his three hundred thousand foot, ten thousand horse, nine hundred chariots of iron? And now, in bravery, he calls for his troops, and means to kill this handful of Israel with the very sight of his piked chariots, and only feared it would be no victory to cut the throats of so few. The faith of Deborah and Barak was not appalled with this world of adversaries, which from Mount Tabor they saw hiding all the valley below them: they knew whom they had believed, and how little an arm of flesh could do against the God of Hosts.

Barak went down against Sisera, but it was God that destroyed him. The Israelites did not this day wield their own swords: lest they should arrogate any thing, God told them before-hand, it should be his own act. I hear not of one stroke that any Canaanite gave in this fight, as if they were called hither only to suffer. And now, proud Sisera, after many curses of the heaviness of that iron carriage, is glad to quit his chariot, and betake himself to his heels. Who ever yet knew any earthly thing trusted in, without disappointment? It is wonder if God make us not at last as weary of whatsoever hath stolen our hearts from him, as ever we were fond.

Yet Sisera hopes to have sped better than his followers, in so seasonable a harbour of Jael. If Heber and Jael had not been great persons, there had been no note taken of their tents; there had been no league betwixt king Jabin and them: now their greatness makes them known, their league makes them trusted. The distress of Sisera might have made him importunate; but Jael begins the courtesy, and exceeds the desire of her guest. He asks water to drink, she gives him milk; he wishes but shelter, she makes him a bed; he desires the protection of her tent, she covers him with a mantle. And now Sisera pleases himself with this happy change, and thinks how much better it is to be here, than in that whirling of chariots, in that horror of flight, amongst those shrieks, those wounds, those carcasses. While he is in these thoughts, his weariness and easy reposal hath brought him asleep. Who would have looked that in this tumult and danger, even betwixt the very jaws of death, Sisera should find time to sleep! How many worldly hearts do so in the midst of their spiritual perils!

Now, while he was dreaming, doubtless, of the clashing of armours, rattling of chariots, neighing of horses, the clamour of the conquered, the furious pursuit of Israel, Jael, seeing his temples lie so fair, as if they invited the nail and hammer, entered into the thought of this noble execution; certainly not without some checks of doubt, and pleas of fear. What if I strike him? And yet, who am I that I should dare to think of such an act? Is not this Sisera, the most famous captain of the world, whose name hath wont to be fearful to whole nations? What if my hand should swerve in the stroke? What if he should awake while I am lifting up this instrument of death? What if I should be surprised by some of his followers, while the fact is green and yet bleeding? Can the murder of so great a leader be hid, or unrevenged? Or, if I might hope so, yet can my heart allow me to be secretly treacherous? Is there not peace betwixt my house and him? Did not I invite him into my tent? Doth he not trust to my friendship and hospitality? But what do these weak fears, these idle fancies of civility? If Sisera be in league with us, yet is he not at defiance with God? Is he not a tyrant to Israel? Is it for nothing that God hath brought him into my tent? May I not now find means to repay unto Israel all their kindness to my grandfather Jethro? Doth not God offer me this day the honour to be the rescuer of his people? Hath God bidden me strike, and shall I hold my hand? No, Sisera, sleep now thy last, and take here this fatal reward of all thy cruelty and oppression.

He, that put this instinct into her heart, did put also strength into her hand: he that guided Sisera to her tent, guided the nail through his temples, which hath made a speedy way for his soul through those parts, and now hath fastened his ear so close to the earth, as if the body had been listening what was become of the soul. There lies now the great terror of Israel at the foot of a woman! He, that brought so many hundred thousands into the field, hath not now one page left, either to avert his death, or to accompany it or bewail it. He, that had vaunted of his iron chariots, is slain by one nail of iron, wanting only this one point of his infelicity, that he knows not by whose hand he perished.

CONTEMPLATION V.—GIDEON'S CALLING.

The judgments of God, still the further they go, the sorer they are. The bondage of Israel under Jabin was great, but it was freedom in comparison of the yoke of the Midianites. During the former tyranny, Deborah was permitted to judge Israel under a palm tree; under this, not so much as private habitations will be allowed to Israel. Then, the seat of judgment was in sight of the sun; now, their very dwellings must be secret under the earth. They that rejected the protection of God, are glad to seek to the mountains for shelter; and as they had savagely abused themselves, so they are fain to creep into dens and caves of the rocks, like wild creatures, for safeguard. God had sown spiritual seed amongst them, and they suffered their heathenish neighbours to pull it up by the roots; and now, no sooner can they sow their material seed, but Midianites and Amalekites are ready by force to destroy it. As they inwardly dealt with God, so God deals outwardly by them; their eyes may tell them what their souls have done; yet that God, whose mercy is above the worst of our sins, sends first his prophet with a message of reproof, and then his angel with a message of deliverance. The Israelites had smarted enough with their servitude, yet God sends them a sharp rebuke. It is a good sign when God chides us; his round reprehensions are ever gracious forerunners of mercy; whereas, his silent connivance at the wicked argues deep and secret displeasure: the prophet made way for the angel, reproof for deliverance, humiliation for comfort.

Gideon was thrashing wheat by the wine-press. Yet Israel hath both wheat and wine, for all the incursions of their enemies. The worst estate out of hell, hath either some comfort, or, at least, some mitigation. In spite of the malice of the world, God makes secret provision for his own. How should it be but he that owns the earth, and all creatures, should reserve ever a sufficiency from foreigners (such the wicked are) for his household? In the worst of the Midianitish tyranny, Gideon's field and barn are privileged, as his fleece was afterwards from the shower.

Why did Gideon thrash out his corn? To hide it, not from his neighbours, but his enemies. His granary might easily be more close than his barn. As then Israelites thrashed out their corn to hide it from the Midianites, but now Midianites thrash out corn to hide it from the Israelites. These rural tyrants of our time, do not more lay up corn, than curses. He that withdraweth corn, the people will curse him; yea, God will curse him, with them, and for them.

What shifts nature will make to live! O that we could be so careful to lay up spiritual food for our souls, out of the reach of these spiritual Midianites! we could not but live in despite of all adversaries.

The angels, that have ever God in their face, and in their thoughts, have him also in their mouths: "The Lord is with thee." But this which appeared unto Gideon was the Angel of the covenant, the Lord of angels. While he was with Gideon, he might well say, "The Lord is with thee." He that sent the Comforter, was also the true Comforter of his church. He well knew how to lay a sure ground of consolation, and that the only remedy of sorrow, and beginning of true joy, is, "The presence of God." The grief of the apostles, for the expected loss of their Master, could never be cured by any receipt, but this of the same Angel, "Behold, I am with you to the end of the world." What is our glory, but the fruition of God's presence? The punishment of the damned is a separation from the beatifical face of God; needs must therefore his absence in this life, be a great torment to a good heart: and no cross can be equivalent to this beginning of heaven in the elect, "The Lord is with thee."

Who can complain either of solitariness or opposition, that hath God with him; with him, not only as a witness, but as a party? Even wicked men and devils cannot exclude God, not the bars of hell can shut him out. He is with them by force, but to judge, to punish them; yea, God will be ever with them to their cost; but to protect, comfort, save, he is with none but his.

While he calls Gideon valiant, he makes him so. How could he be but valiant, that had God with him? The godless man may be careless, but cannot be other than cowardly. It pleases God to acknowledge his own graces in men, that he may interchange his own glory with their comfort; how much more should we confess the graces of one another? An envious nature is prejudicial to God. He is a strange man in whom there is not some visible good; yea, in the devils themselves we may easily note some commendable parts of knowledge, strength, agility. Let God have his own in the worst creature; yea, let the worst creature have that praise which God would put upon it.

Gideon cannot pass over this salutation as some fashionable compliment, but lays hold on that part which was most important, the tenure of all his comfort; and, as not regarding the praise of his valour, inquires after that which should be the ground of his valour, the presence of God. God had spoken particularly to him: he expostulates for all. It had been possible God shall be present with him, not with the rest; as he promised to have been with Moses, Israel; and yet when God says, "The Lord is with thee," he answers, "Alas, Lord, if the Lord be with us." Gideon cannot conceive of himself as an exempt person; but puts himself among the throng of Israel, as one that could not be sensible of any particular comfort, while the common case of Israel laboured. The main care of a good heart is still for the public, neither can it enjoy itself, while the church of God is distressed. As faith draws home generalities, so charity diffuses generalities from itself to all.

Yet the valiant man was here weak, weak in faith, weak in discourse, whilst he argues God's absence by affliction, his presence by deliverances, and the unlikelihood of success by his own disability, all gross inconsequences. Rather should he have inferred God's presence upon their correction; for wheresoever God chastises, there he is, yea, there he is in mercy. Nothing more proves us his, than his stripes; he will not bestow whipping where he loves not. Fond nature thinks God should not suffer the wind to blow upon his dear ones, because herself makes this use of her own indulgence; but none out of the place of torment have suffered so much as his dearest children. He says not, We are idolaters; therefore the Lord hath forsaken us, because we have forsaken him. This sequel had been as good, as the other was faulty; the Lord hath delivered us unto the Midianites, therefore he hath forsaken us. Sins, not afflictions, argue God absent.

Whilst Gideon bewrayeth weakness, God both gives him might, and employs it; "Go in this thy might and save Israel." Who would not have looked, that God should have looked angrily on him, and chide him for his unbelief? But he, whose mercy will not quench the weakest fire of grace, though it be but in flax, looks upon him with compassionate eyes; and, to make good his own word, gives him that valour he had acknowledged.

Gideon had not yet said, "Lord, deliver Israel;" much less had he said, "Lord, deliver Israel by my hand." The mercy of God prevents the desire of Gideon. If God should not begin with us, we should be ever miserable; if he should not give us till we ask, yet who should give us to ask? If his Spirit did not work those holy groans and sighs in us, we should never make suit to God. He that commonly gives us power to crave, sometimes gives us without craving, that the benefit might be so much more welcome, by how much less it was expected; and we so much more thankful as he is more forward. When he bids us ask, it is not for that he needs to be entreated, but that he may make us more capable of blessings by desiring them. And where he sees fervent desires, he stays not for words; and he that gives ere we ask, how much more will he give when we ask?

He that hath might enough to deliver Israel, yet hath not might enough to keep himself from doubting. The strongest faith will ever have some touch of infidelity. And yet this was not so much a distrust of the possibility of delivering Israel, as an inquiry after the means. "Whereby shall I save Israel?" The salutation of the angel to Gideon was as like

Gabriel's salutation of the blessed virgin, as their answers were like: both angels brought news of deliverance, both were answered with a question of the means of performance, with a report of the difficulties in performing; "Ah, my Lord, whereby shall I save Israel?" How the good man disparages himself! It is a great matter, O Lord, that thou speakest of, and great actions require mighty agents. As for me, who am I? my tribe is none of the greatest in Israel; my father's family is one of the meanest in his tribe, and I the meanest in his family. Poverty is a sufficient bar to great enterprises.

"Whereby shall I?" Humility is both a sign of following glory, and a way to it, and an occasion of it. Bragging, and height of spirit, will not carry it with God. None have ever been raised by him, but those which have formerly dejected themselves: none have been confounded by him, that have been abased in themselves. Thereupon it is that he adds; "I will therefore be with thee;" as if he had answered, Hadst thou not been so poor in thyself, I would not have wrought by thee. How should God be magnified in his mercies, if we were not unworthy? How should he be strong, if not in our weakness?

All this while Gideon knew not it was an angel that spake with him; he saw a man stand before him like a traveller, with a staff in his hand. The unusualness of those revelations, in those corrupted times, was such that Gideon might think of any thing rather than an angel. No marvel if so strange a promise, from an unknown messenger, found not a perfect assent; fain would he believe, but fain would he have good warrant for his faith. In matters of faith we cannot go upon too sure grounds. As Moses therefore being sent upon the same errand, desired a sign, whereby Israel might know that God sent him; so Gideon desires a sign from this bearer, to know that this news is from God.

Yet the very hope of so happy news, not yet ratified, stirs up in Gideon both joy and thankfulness. After all the injury of the Midianites, he was not so poor, but he could bestow a kid and cakes upon the reporter of such tidings. Those which are rightly affected with the glad news of our spiritual deliverance, study to show their loving respects to the messengers.

The angel stays for the preparing of Gideon's feast. Such pleasure doth God take in the thankful endeavours of his servants, that he patiently waits upon the leisure of our performances. Gideon intended a dinner, the angel turned it into a sacrifice. He, whose meat and drink it was to do his Father's will, calls for the broth and flesh to be poured out upon the stone; and when Gideon looked he should have blessed, and eaten, he touches the feast with his staff, and consumes it with fire from the stone, and departs. He did not strike the stone with his staff, (for the attrition of two hard bodies would naturally beget fire) but he touched the meat, and brought fire from the stone. And now, while Gideon saw and wondered at the spiritual act, he lost the sight of the agent.

He, that came without entreating, would not have departed without taking leave; but that he might increase Gideon's wonder, and that his wonder might increase his faith. His salutation therefore was not so strange as his farewell. Moses touched the rock with his staff, and brought forth water, and yet a man, and yet continued with the Israelites. This messenger touches the stone with his staff, and brings forth fire, and presently vanishes, that he may approve himself a spirit. And now, Gideon, when he had gathered up himself, must needs think, He that can raise fire out of a stone, can raise courage and power out of my dead breast: he that by this fire hath consumed the broth and flesh, can, by the feeble flame of my fortitude, consume Midian.

Gideon did not so much doubt before, as now he feared. We, that shall once live with, and be like angels, in the estate of our impotency, think we cannot see an angel and live. Gideon was acknowledged for mighty in valour, yet he trembles at the sight of an angel. Peter, that durst draw his sword upon Malchus and all the train of Judas, yet fears when he thought he had seen a spirit. Our natural courage cannot bear us out against spiritual objects. This angel was homely and familiar, taking upon him, for the time, a resemblance of that flesh whereof he would afterwards take the substance: yet even the valiant Gideon quakes to have seen him. How awful and glorious is the God of angels, when he will be seen in the state of heaven!

The angel that departed for the wonder, yet returns for the comfort of Gideon. It is not usual with God to leave his children in amaze, but he brings them out in the same mercy which led them in, and will magnify his grace in the one, no less than his power in the other.

Now Gideon grows acquainted with God, and interchanges pledges of familiarity; he builds an altar to God, and God confers with him, and (as he uses where he loves) employs him. His first task must be to destroy the god of the Midianites, then the idolaters themselves. While Baal's altar and grove stood in the hill of Ophrah, Israel should in vain hope to prevail. It is most just with God, that judgment should continue with the sin, and no less mercy if it may remove after it. Wouldst thou fain be rid of any judgment? Inquire what false altars and groves thou hast in thy heart; down with them first.

First must Baal's altar be ruined, ere God's be built; both may not stand together; the true God will have no society with idols, neither will allow it us. I do not hear him say, That altar and grove, which were abused to Baal, consecrate now to me; but, as one whose holy jealousy will abide no worship till there be no idolatry, he first commands down the monuments of superstition, and then enjoins his own service; yet the wood of Baal's grove must be used to burn a sacrifice unto God. When it was once cut down, God's detestation and their danger ceased. The good creatures of God that have been profaned to idolatry, may, in a change of their use, be employed to the holy service of their Maker.

Though some Israelites were penitent under this humiliation, yet still many of them persisted in their wonted idolatry. The very household of Gideon's father were still Baalites, and his neighbours of Ophrah were in the same sin: yea, if his father had been free, what did he with Baal's grove and altar? He dares not therefore take his father's servants, though he took his bullocks, but commands his own. The master is best seen in the servants: Gideon's servants (amongst the idolatrous retinue of Joash) are religious like their master; yet the misdevotion of Joash and the Ophrathites was not obstinate. Joash is easily persuaded by his sons, and easily persuades his neighbours, how unreasonable it is to plead for such a god, as cannot speak for himself; to revenge his cause, that could not defend himself. "Let Baal plead for himself."

One example of a resolute onset in a noted person, may do more good than a thousand seconds in the proceeding of an action.

Soon are all the Midianites in an uproar to lose their god; they need not now be bidden to muster themselves for revenge. He hath no religion, that can suffer an indignity offered to his God.

CONTEMPLATION VI.—GIDEON'S PREPARATION AND VICTORY.

OF all the instruments that God did use in so great a work, I find none so weak as Gideon, (who yet of all others) was styled valiant. Natural valour may well stand with spiritual cowardice. Before he knew that he spake with a God, he might have had just colours for his distrust; but after God had approved his presence, and almighty power, by fetching fire out of the stone, then to call for a watery sign of his promised deliverance, was no other than to pour water upon the fire of the Spirit. The former trial God gave vanished; this, upon Gideon's choice and entreaty. The former miracle was strong enough to carry Gideon through his first exploit of ruinating the idolatrous grove and altar; but now, when he saw the swarm of the Midianites and Amalekites about his ears, he calls for new aid; and, not trusting to the Abiezrites, and his other thousands of Israel, he runs to God for a further assurance of victory.

The refuge was good, but the manner of seeking it savours of distrust. There is nothing more easy than to be valiant, when no peril appeareth; but when evils assail us, upon equal terms, it is hard, and commendable, not to be dismayed. If God had made that proclamation now, which afterwards was commanded to be made by Gideon, "Let the timorous depart;" I doubt whether Israel had not wanted a guide; yet how willing is the Almighty to satisfy our weak desires!

What tasks is he content to be set by our infirmity! The fleece must be wet, and the ground dry; the ground must be wet, and the fleece dry: both are done, that now Gideon may see whether he would make himself hard earth, or yielding wool. God could at pleasure distinguish betwixt him and the Midianites, and pour down either mercies or judgments where he lists; and that he was set on work by that God which can command all the elements, and they obey him; fire, water, earth, serve both him and (when he will) his.

And now when Gideon had this reciprocal proof of his ensuing success, he goes on (as he well may) harnessed with resolution, and is seen in the head of his troops, and in the face of the Midianites. If we cannot make up the match with God, when we have our own asking, we are worthy to sit out.

Gideon had thirty-two thousand soldiers at his heels. The Midianites covered all the valley like grasshoppers: and now, whilst the Israelites think, we are too few, God says, "The people are too many." If the Israelites must have looked for victory from their fingers, they might have well said, the Midianites are too many for us: but that God, whose thoughts and words are unlike to men's, says, "They are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands." If human strength were to be opposed, there should have needed an equality; but now God meant to give the victory, his care is not how to get it, but how to lose or blemish the glory of it gotten. How jealous God is of his honour! He is willing to give deliverance to Israel, but the praise of the deliverance he will keep to himself; and will shorten the means, that he may have the full measure of the glory. And if he will not allow lawful means to stand in the light of his honour, how will he endure it to be crossed so much as indirectly? It is less danger to steal any thing from God than his glory.

As a prince, which, if we steal or clip his coin, may pardon it; but if we go about to rob him of his crown, will not be appeased. There is nothing that we can give to God, of whom we receive all things; that which he is content to part with, he gives us, but he will not abide we should take ought from him which he would reserve for himself. It is all one with him to save with many as with few; but he rather chooses to save by few, that all the victory may redound to himself. O God, what art thou better for praises, to whom, because thou art infinite, nothing can be added! It is for our good that thou wouldst be magnified of us. O teach us to receive the benefit of thy merciful favours, and to return thee the thanks.

Gideon's army must be lessened. Who are so fit to be cashiered as the fearful? God bids him, therefore, proclaim license for all faint hearts to leave the field. An ill instrument may shame a good work. God will not glorify himself by cowards. As the timorous shall be without the gates of heaven, so shall they be without the lists of God's field. Although it was not their courage that should save Israel, yet, without their courage, God would not serve himself of them. Christianity requires men; for if our spiritual difficulties meet not with high spirits, instead of whetting our fortitude, they quell it. David's royal band of worthies was the type of the forces of the church, all valiant men, and able to encounter with thousands.

Neither must we be strong only, but acquainted with our own resolutions, not out of any carnal presumption, but out of a faithful reliance upon the strength of God, in whom, when we are weak, then we are strong. O thou white-liver! Doth but a foul word, or a frown, scare thee from Christ? Doth the loss of a little land, or silver, disquiet thee? Doth but the sight of the Midianites in the valley strike thee? Home, then, home to the world; thou art not, then, for the conquering band of Christ: if thou canst not resolve to follow him through infamy, prisons, racks, gibbets, flames, depart to thine house, and save thy life to thy loss.

Methinks now Israel should have complained of indignity, and have said, Why shouldst thou think, O Gideon, that there can be a cowardly Israelite? And if the experience of the power and mercy of God be not enough to make us fearless, yet the sense of servitude must needs have made us resolute; for who had not rather to be buried dead than quick? Are we not fain to hide our heads in the caves of the earth, and to make our graves our houses? Not so much as the very light that we can freely enjoy. The tyranny of death is but short and easy to this of Midian; and yet what danger can there be of that, since thou hast so certainly assured us of God's promise of victory, and his miraculous confirmation? No, Gideon, those hearts that have brought us hither after thy colours, can as well keep us from retiring.

But now, who can but bless himself to find, of two and thirty thousand Israelites, two and twenty thousand cowards? Yet all these in Gideon's march, made as fair a flourish of courage as the boldest. Who can trust the faces of men, that sees, in the army of Israel, above two for one timorous? How many make a glorious show in the warfaring church, which, when they shall see danger of persecution, shall shrink from the standard of God? Hope of safety, examples of neighbours, desire of praise, fear of censures, coaction of laws, fellowship of friends, draw many into the field, which, so soon as ever they see the adversary, repent of their conditions; and, if they may cleanly escape, will be gone early from mount Gilead. Can any man be offended at the number of these shrinkers, when he sees but ten thousand Israelites left of two and thirty thousand in a morning?

These men, that would have been ashamed to go away by day, now drop away by night: and if Gideon should have called any one of them back, and said, Wilt thou fly? would have made an excuse: the darkness is a fit veil for their paleness, or blushing; fearfulness cannot abide the light. None of these thousands of Israel but would have been loath Gideon should have seen his face, whilst he said, I am fearful! Very shame holds some in their station, whose hearts are already fled. And if we cannot endure that men should be witnesses of that fear, which we might live to correct, how shall we abide once to show our fearful heads before that terrible Judge, when he calls us forth to the punishment of our fear? O the vanity of foolish hypocrites, that run upon the terrors of God, whilst they would avoid the shame of men!

How do we think the small remainder of Israel looked, when, in the next morning-muster, they found themselves but ten thousand left? How did they accuse their timorous countrymen, that had left but this handful to encounter the millions of Midian? And yet still God complains of too many; and, upon his trial, dismisses nine thousand seven hundred more. His first trial was of the valour of their minds; his next is of the ability of their bodies. Those which, besides boldness, are not strong, patient of labour and thirst, willing to stoop, content with a little, (such were those that took up water with their hands,) are not for the select band of God. The Lord of Hosts will serve himself of none but able champions. If he have therefore singled us into his combat, this very choice argues, that he finds that strength in us, which we cannot confess in ourselves. How can it but comfort us in our great trials, that if the Searcher of hearts did not find us fit, he would never honour us with so hard an employment.

Now, when there is not scarce left one Israelite to every thousand of the Midianites, it is seasonable with God to join battle. When God hath stripped us of all our earthly confidence, then doth he find time to give us victory, and not till then, lest he should be a loser in our gain: like as at last he unclothes us of our body, that he may clothe us upon with glory.

If Gideon feared when he had two and thirty thousand Israelites at his heels, is it any wonder if he feared, when all these were shrunk unto three hundred? Though his confirmation were more, yet his means were abated. Why was not Gideon rather the leader of those two and twenty thousand run-aways, than of these three hundred soldiers? O infinite mercy and forbearance of God, that takes not advantage of so strong an infirmity, but instead of casting, encourages him! That wise providence hath prepared a dream in the head of one Midianite, an interpretation in the mouth of another, and hath brought Gideon to be an auditor of both; and hath made his enemies prophets of his victory, encouragers of the attempt, proclaimers of their own confusion. A Midianite dreams, a Midianite interprets. Our very dreams many times are not without God; there is a providence in our sleeping fancies. Even the enemies of God may have visions, and power to construe them aright. How usually are wicked men forewarned of their own destruction? To foreknow, and not avoid, is but an aggravation of judgment.

When Gideon heard good news, though from an enemy, he fell down and worshipped. To hear himself but a barley-cake troubled him not, when he heard withal that his rolling down the hill should break the tents of Midian. It matters not how base we be thought, so we may be victorious. The soul that hath received full confirmation from God in the assurance of his salvation, cannot but bow the knee, and by all gestures of body tell how it is ravished. I would have thought Gideon should rather have found full confirmation in the promise and act of God, than in the dream of the Midianite. Dreams may be full of uncertainty; God's undertakings are infallible. Well therefore might the miracle of God give strength to the dream of a Midianite; but what strength could a pagan's dream give to the miraculous act of God? yet by this is Gideon throughly settled. When we are going, a little thing drives us on; when we are come near the shore, the very tide, without sails, is enough to put us into the harbour. We shall now hear no more of Gideon's doubts, but of his achievements. And though God had promised by these three hundred to chase the Midianites, yet he neglects not wise stratagems to effect it. To wait for God's performance in doing nothing, is to abuse that divine providence, which will so work, that will not allow us idle.

Now, when we would look that Gideon should give charge of whetting their swords, and sharping their spears, and fitting their armour, he only gives order for empty pitchers, and lights, and trumpets. The cracking of these pitchers shall break in pieces this Midianitish clay; the kindling of these lights shall extinguish the light of Midian; these trumpets sound no other than a soul-peal to all the host of Midian: there shall need nothing but noise and light to confound this innumerable army.

And if the pitchers, and brands, and trumpets of Gideon, did so daunt and dismay the proud troops of Midian and Amalek, who can we think shall be able to stand before the last terror, wherein the trumpet of the archangel shall sound, and the heaven shall pass away with a noise, and the elements shall be on a flame about our ears?

Any of the weakest Israelites would have served to have broken an empty pitcher, to have carried a light, and to have sounded a trumpet, and to strike a flying adversary. Not to the basest use will God employ an unworthy agent: he will not allow so much as a cowardly torch-bearer.

Those two-and-twenty thousand Israelites that slipped away for fear, when the fearful Midianites fled, can pursue and kill them, and can follow them at the heels, whom they durst not look in the face. Our flight gives advantage to the feeblest adversary, whereas our resistance foileth the greatest. How much more, if we once turned our backs upon a temptation, shall our spiritual enemies, which are ever strong, trample us in the dust? Resist, and they shall fly. Stand still, and we shall see the salvation of the Lord.

CONTEMPLATION VII.—THE REVENGE OF SUCCOTH AND PENUEL.

GIDEON was of Manasseh: Ephraim and he were brothers, sons of Joseph. None of all the tribes of Israel fall out with their victorious leader but he. The agreement of brothers is rare; by how much nature hath more endeared them, by so much are their quarrels more frequent and dangerous. I did not hear the Ephraimites offering themselves into the front of the army before the fight, and now they are ready to fight with Gideon, because they were not called to fight with Midian; I hear them expostulating after it. After the exploit done cowards are valiant. Their quarrel was that they were not called. It had been a greater praise of their valour to have gone unbidden. What need was there to call them, when God complained of multitude, and sent away those which were called? None spake so big in the end of the fray, as the fearfullest.

Ephraim flies upon Gideon, whilst the Midianites fly from him; when Gideon should be pursuing his enemies, he is pursued by brethren, and now is glad to spend that wind in pacifying of his own, which should have been bestowed in the slaughter of a common adversary. It is a wonder if Satan suffer us to be quiet at home, whilst we are exercised with wars abroad. Had not Gideon learned to speak fair, as well as to smite, he had found work enough from the swords of Joseph's sons: his good words are as victorious as his sword; his pacification of friends, better than his execution of enemies.

For ought I see, the envy of Israelites was not more troublesome to Gideon, than the opposition of Midian. He hath left the envy of Ephraim behind him; before him, he finds the envy of Succoth and Penuel. The one envies that he should overcome without them; the other, that he should say he had overcome. His pursuit leads him to Succoth; there he craves relief, and is repelled. Had he said, Come forth and draw your sword with me against Zeba and Zalmunna, the motion had been but equal. A common interest challenges a universal aid. Now he says but "Give morsels of bread to my followers," he is turned off with a scorn; he asks bread, and they give him a stone. Could he ask a more slender recompense of their deliverance, or a less reward of his victory? "Give morsels of bread." Before this act, all their substance had been too small a hire for their freedom from Midian; now, when it is done, a morsel of bread is too much. Well might he challenge bread where he gave liberty and life. It is hard, if those which fight the wars of God may not have necessary relief; that whilst the enemy dies by them, they should die by famine. If they had laboured for God at home in peace, they had been worthy of maintenance; how much more now, that danger is added to their toil? Even very executioners look for fees; but here were not malefactors, but adversaries to be slain; the sword of power and revenge was now to be wielded, not of quiet justice. Those that fight for our souls against spiritual powers, may challenge bread from us; and it is shameless unthankfulness to deny it. When Abraham had vanquished the five kings, and delivered Lot and his family, the king of Salem met him with bread and wine; and now these sons of Abraham, after an equal victory, ask dry bread, and are denied by their brethren. Craftily yet, and under pretence of a false title, had they acknowledged the victory of Gideon; with what forehead could they have denied him bread?

Now, I know not whether their faithlessness, or envy, lies in their way; "Are the hands of Zeba and Zalmunna in thy hands?" There were none of these princes of Succoth and Penuel, but thought themselves better men than Gideon; that he therefore alone should do that, which all the princes of Israel durst not attempt, they hated and scorned to hear. It is never safe to measure events by the power of the instrument; nor, in the causes of God (whose calling makes the difference), to measure others by themselves. There is nothing more dangerous, than in holy businesses to stand upon comparisons, and our own reputation; since it is reason God should both choose and bless where he lists.

To have questioned so sudden a victory had been pardonable; but to deny it scornfully, was unworthy of Israelites. Carnal men think that impossible to others, which themselves cannot do: from hence are their censures, hence their exclamations.

Gideon hath vowed a fearful revenge, and now performs it; the taunts of his brethren may not stay him from the pursuit of the Midianites: common enmities must first be opposed, domestical at more leisure. The princes of Succoth feared the tyranny of the Midianitish kings, but they more feared Gideon's victory. What a condition hath their envy drawn them into, that they are sorry to see God's enemies captive, that Israel's freedom must be their death, that the Midianites and they must tremble at one and the same revenger! To see themselves prisoners to Zeba and Zalmunna had not been so fearful, as to see Zeba and Zalmunna prisoners to Gideon. Nothing is more terrible to evil minds, than to read their own condemnation in the happy success of others. Hell itself would want one piece of its torment, if the wicked did not know those, whom they contemned, glorious.

I know not whether more to commend Gideon's wisdom and moderation in the proceedings, than his resolution and justice in the execution of this business. I do not see him run furiously into the city, and kill the next; his sword had not been so drunken with blood, that it should know no difference: but he writes down the names of the princes, and singles them forth for revenge.

When the leaders of God came to Jericho, or Ai, their slaughter was unpartial; not a woman or child might live to tell news: but now that Gideon comes to Succoth, a city of Israelites, the rulers are called forth to death; the people are frighted with the example, not hurt with the judgment. To enwrap the innocent in any vengeance, is a murderous injustice. Indeed, where all join in the sin, all are worthy to meet in the punishment. It is like, the citizens of Succoth could have been glad to succour Gideon, if their rulers had not forbidden. They must therefore escape while their princes perish.

I cannot think of Gideon's revenge without horror; that the rulers of Succoth should have their flesh torn from their backs with thorns and briers, that they should be at once beaten and scratched to death. What a spectacle it was, to see their bare bones looking somewhere through the bloody rags of their flesh and skin, and every stroke worse than the last, death multiplied by torment! Justice is sometimes so severe, that a tender beholder can scarce discern it from cruelty.

I see the Midianites far less ill; the edge of the sword makes a speedy and easy passage for their lives, while these rebellious Israelites die lingering under thorns and briers, envying those in their death whom their life abhorred. Howsoever men live or die without the pale of the church a wicked Israelite shall be sure of plagues. How many shall unwish themselves Christians, when God's revenges have found them out!

The place where Jacob wrestled with God, and prevailed, now hath wrestled against God, and takes a fall: they see God avenged, which would not believe him delivering.

It was now time for Zeba and Zalmunna to follow those their troops to the grave, whom they had led in the field. Those, which the day before were attended with a hundred and thirty-five thousand followers, have not so much as a page now left to weep for their death, and have lived only to see all their friends, and some enemies die for their sakes.

Who can regard earthly greatness, that sees one night change two of the greatest kings of the world into captives! It had been both pity and sin, that the heads of that Midianitish tyranny, into which they had drawn so many thousands, should have escaped that death.

And yet, if private revenge had not made Gideon just, I doubt whether they had died. The blood of his brothers calls for theirs, and awakes his sword to their execution. He both knew and complained of the Midianitish oppression, under which Israel groaned: yet the cruelty offered to all the thousands of his father's sons, had not drawn the blood of Zeba and Zalmunna, if his own mother's sons had not bled by their hands.

He that slew the rulers of Succoth and Penuel, and spared the people, now hath slain the people of Midian, and would have spared their rulers; but that God, which will find occasions to wind wicked men into judgment, will have them slain in a private quarrel, which had more deserved it for the public; if we may not rather say, that Gideon revenged these as a magistrate, not as a brother. For governors to respect their own ends in public actions, and to wear the sword of justice in their own sheath, it is a wrongful abuse of authority. The slaughter of Gideon's brethren was not the greatest sin of the Midianitish kings; this alone shall kill them, when the rest expected an unjust remission. How many lewd men hath God paid with some one sin for all the rest!

Some, that have gone away with unnatural filthiness, and capital thefts, have clipped off their own days with their coin; others, whose bloody murders have been punished in a mutinous word; others, whose suspected felony hath paid the price of their unknown rape. O God, thy judgments are just, even when men's are unjust!

Gideon's young son is bidden to revenge the death of his uncles: his sword had not yet learned the way to blood, especially of kings, though in irons. Deadly executions require strength both of heart and face. How are those aged in evil that can draw their swords upon the lawfully anointed of God? These tyrants plead not now for continuance of life, but for the haste of the death; "Fall thou upon us." Death is ever accompanied with pain, which it is no marvel if we wish short. We do not more affect protraction of an easy life, than speed in our dissolution; for here every pang, that tends toward death, renews it. To lie an hour under death is tedious, but to be dying a whole day, we think above the strength of human patience. O what shall we then conceive of that death which knows no end? As this life is no less frail than the body which it animates, so that death is no less eternal than the soul which must endure it.

For us to be dying so long as we now have leave to live, is intolerable; and yet one only minute of that other tormenting death is worse than an age of this. O the desperate infidelity of careless men, that shrink at the thought of a momentary death, and fear not eternal! This is but a killing of the body, that is a destruction of body and soul.

Who is so worthy to wear the crown of Israel, as he that won the crown from Midian? Their usurpers were gone, now they are heedless; it is a doubt whether they were better to have had no kings, or tyrants. They sue to Gideon to accept of the kingdom, and are repulsed. There is no greater example of modesty, than Gideon. When the angel spake to him, he abased himself below all Israel; when the Ephraimites contended with him, he prefers their gleanings to his vintage, and casts his honour at their feet: and now, when Israel proffers him that kingdom which he had merited, he refuses it. He that in overcoming would allow them to cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," in governing will have none but "The sword of the Lord."

That which others plot and sue, and swear, and bribe for, (dignity and superiority,) he seriously rejects, whether it were for that he knew God had not yet called them to a monarchy, or rather for that he saw the crown among thorns. Why do we ambitiously affect the command of these mole-hills of earth, when wise men have refused the proffers of kingdoms? Why do we not rather labour for that kingdom which is free from all cares, from all uncertainty?

Yet he that refuses their crown, calls for their ear-rings, although not to enrich himself, but religion. So long had God been a stranger to Israel, that now superstition goes current for devout worship. It were pity that good intentions should make any man wicked; here they did so. Never man meant better than Gideon in his rich ephod; yet this very act set all Israel on whoring. God had chosen a place, and a service of his own. When the wit of man will be overpleasing God with better devices than his own, it turns to madness, and ends in mischief.

CONTEMPLATION VIII.—ABIMELECH'S USURPATION.

GIDEON refused the kingdom of Israel when it was offered; his seventy sons offered not to obtain that sceptre, which their father's victory had deserved to make hereditary: only Abimelech, the concubine's son, sues and ambitiously plots for it. What could Abimelech see in himself, that he should overlook all his brethren? If he looked to his father, they were his equals; if to his mother, they were his betters. Those that are most unworthy of honours are hottest in the chase of it; whilst the conscience of better deserts, bids men sit still, and stay to be either importuned or neglected. There can be no greater sign of unfitness, than vehement suit. It is hard to say, whether there be more pride or ignorance in ambition. I have noted this difference betwixt spiritual and earthly honour, and the clients of both; we cannot be worthy of the one without earnest prosecution, nor with earnest prosecution worthy of the other. The violent obtain heaven; only the meek are worthy to inherit the earth.

That which an aspiring heart hath projected, it will find both argument and means to effect: if either bribes or favour will carry it the proud man will not sit out. The Shechemites are fit brokers for Abimelech; that city which once betrayed itself to utter depopulation, in yielding to the suit of Hamor, now betrays itself, and all Israel, in yielding to the request of Abimelech. By them hath this usurper made himself a fair way to the throne. It was an easy question, Whether will ye admit of the sons of Gideon for your rulers, or of strangers? If of the sons of Gideon, whether of all, or one? If of one, whether of your own flesh and blood, or of others unknown? To cast off the sons of Gideon for strangers, were unthankful; to admit of seventy kings in one small country, were unreasonable: to admit of any other, rather than their own kinsman, were unnatural. Gideon's sons therefore must rule amongst all Israel; one of his sons amongst those seventy: and who should be that one but Abimelech? Natural respects are the most dangerous corrupters of all elections. What hope can there be of worthy superiors in any free people, where nearness of blood carries it from fitness of disposition? Whilst they say, "He is our brother," they are enemies to themselves and Israel.

Fair words have won his brethren, they the Shechemites: the Shechemites furnish him with money, money with men: his men begin with murder, and now Abimelech reigns alone. Flattery, bribes, and blood, are the usual stairs of the ambitious. The money of Baal is a fit hire for murderers; that which idolatry hath gathered, is fitly spent upon treason. One devil is ready to help another in mischief; seldom ever is ill gotten riches better employed. It is no wonder if he, that hath Baal his idol, now make an idol of honour. There was never any man that worshipped but one idol. Woe be to them that lie in the way of the aspiring; though they be brothers, they shall bleed; yea, the nearer they are, the more sure is their ruin. Who would not now think that Abimelech should find a hell in his breast, after so barbarous and unnatural a massacre? and yet, behold, he is as senseless as the stone upon which the blood of his seventy brethren was spilt. Where ambition hath possessed itself thoroughly of the soul, it turns the heart into steel, and makes it incapable of a conscience. All sins will easily down with the man that is resolved to rise.

Only Jotham fell not at that fatal stone with his brethren. It is a hard battle where none escapes. He escapes, not to reign, nor to revenge, but to be a prophet, and a witness of the vengeance of God upon the usurper, upon the abettors; he lives to tell Abimelech that he was but a bramble, a weed rather than a tree. A right bramble indeed; that grew out of the base hedge-row of a concubine, that could not lift up his head from the earth, unless he were supported by some bush or pale of Shechem, that had laid hold of the fleece of Israel, and had drawn blood of all his brethren; and, lastly, that had no substance in him, but the sap of vain glory, and the pricks of cruelty. It was better than a kingdom to him, out of his obscure bier, to see the fire out of this bramble to consume those trees. The view of God's revenge is so much more pleasing to a good heart, than his own, by how much it is more just and full.

There was never such a pattern of unthankfulness as these Israelites. They who lately thought a kingdom too small recompense for Gideon and his sons, now think it too much for his seed to live; and take life away from the sons of him, that gave them both life and liberty. Yet if this had been some hundreds of years after, when time had worn out the memory of Jerub-baal, it might have borne a better excuse. No man can hope to hold pace with time: the best names may not think scorn to be unknown to following generations. But ere their deliverer was cold in his coffin, to pay his benefits (which deserve to be everlasting) with the extirpation of his posterity, it was more than savage. What can be looked for from idolaters? If a man have cast off his God, he will easily cast off his friends. When religion is once gone, humanity will not stay long after.

That which the people were punished afterwards for but desiring, he enjoys. Now is Abimelech seated in the throne which his father refused, and no rival is seen to envy his peace. But how long will this glory last? Stay but three years, and ye shall see this bramble withered and burnt. The prosperity of the wicked is but short and fickle. A stolen crown (though it may look fair) cannot be made of any but brittle stuff. All life is uncertain; but wickedness overruns nature.

The evil spirit thrust himself into the plot of Abimelech's usurpation and murder, and wrought with the Shechemites for both; and now God sends the evil spirit betwixt Abimelech and the Shechemites to work the ruin of each other. The first could not have been without God; but, in the second, God challenges a part. Revenge is his, where the sin is ours. It had been pity that the Shechemites should have been plagued by any other hand than Abimelech's. They raised him unjustly to the throne, they are the first that feel the weight of his sceptre. The foolish bird limes herself with that which grew from her own excretion. Who wonders to see the kind peasant stung with his own snake?

The breach begins at Shechem: his own countrymen fly off from their promised allegiance. Though all Israel should have fallen off from Abimelech, yet they of Shechem should have stuck close. It was their act, they ought to have made it good. How should good princes be honoured, when even Abimelechs, once settled, cannot be opposed with safety? Now they begin to revolt to the rest of Israel. Yet, if this had been done out of repentance, it had been praiseworthy; but to be done out of a treacherous inconstancy, was unworthy of Israelites. How could Abimelech hope for fidelity, of them, whom he had made and found traitors to his father's blood? No man knows how to be sure of him that is unconscionable. He that hath been unfaithful to one, knows the way to be perfidious, and is only fit for his trust that is worthy to be deceived; whereas faithfulness, besides the present good, lays a ground of further assurance. The friendship that is begun in evil cannot stand; wickedness both of its own nature, and through the curse of God, is ever unsteady: and though there be not a disagreement in hell, (being but the place of retribution, not of action) yet on earth there is no peace among the wicked; whereas that affection which is knit in God, is indissoluble.

If the men of Shechem had abandoned their false god, with their false king, and out of a serious remorse, and desire of satisfaction for their idolatry and blood, had opposed this tyrant, and preferred Jotham to his throne, there might have been both warrant for their quarrel, and hope of success: but now, if Abimelech be a wicked usurper, yet the Shechemites are idolatrous traitors. How could they think, that God would rather revenge Abimelech's bloody intrusion by them, than their treachery and idolatry by Abimelech? When the quarrel is betwixt God and Satan, there is no doubt of the issue; but when one devil fights with another, what certainty is there of the victory? Though the cause of God had been good, yet it had been safe for them to look to themselves. The unworthiness of the agent many times curses a good enterprise.

No sooner is a secret dislike kindled in any people against their governors, than there is a gale ready to blow the coals. It were a wonder, if ever any faction should want a head; as, contrarily, never any man was so ill, as not to have some favourers: Abimelech hath a Zebul in the midst of Shechem. Lightly, all treasons are betrayed, even with some of their own: his intelligence brings the sword of Abimelech upon Shechem, who now hath demolished the city, and sown it with salt. O the just successions of the revenges of God! Gideon's ephod is punished with the blood of his sons; the blood of his sons is shed by the procurement of the Shechemites; the blood of the Shechemites is shed by Abimelech; the blood of Abimelech is spilt by a woman. The retaliations of God are sure and just, and make a more due pedigree than descent of nature.

The pursued Shechemites fly to the house of their god Berith; now they are safe: that place is at once a fort, and a sanctuary. Whither should we fly in our distress, but to our God? And now this refuge shall teach them what a God they have served. The jealous God, whom they had forsaken, hath them now where he would, and rejoices at once to be avenged of their God and them. Had they not made the house of Baal their shelter, they had not died so fearfully. Now, according to the prophecy of Jotham, a fire goes out of the bramble, and consumes these cedars, and their eternal flames begin in the house of their Berith. The confusion of wicked men rises out of the false deities which they have doted on.

Of all the conspirators against Gideon's sons, only Abimelech yet survives; and his day is now coming. His success against Shechem hath filled his heart with thoughts of victory; he hath caged up the inhabitants of Tebez within their tower also; and what remains for them, but the same end with their neighbours? And behold, while his hand is busy in putting fire to the door of their tower, which yet was not high, (for then he could not have discerned a woman to be his executioner), a stone from a woman's hand strikes his head. His pain in dying was not so much, as his indignation to know by whom he died; and rather will he die twice, than a woman should kill him. If God had not known his stomach so big, he had not vexed him with the impotency of his victor. God finds a time to reckon with wicked men, for all the arrearages of their sins. Our sins are not more our debts to God, than his judgments are his debts to our sins, which at last he will be sure to pay home. There now lies the greatness of Abimelech: upon one stone had he slain his seventy brethren, and now a stone slays him: his head had stolen the crown of Israel, and now his head is smitten. And what is Abimelech better that he was a king? What difference is there between him and any of his seventy brethren whom he murdered, save only in guiltiness? They bear but their own blood; he the weight of all theirs. How happy a thing it is to live well, that our death, as it is certain, so may be comfortable! What a vanity is it to exult in the death of them, whom we must follow the same way!

The tyrant hath his payment, and that time which he should have bestowed in calling for mercy to God, and washing his soul with the last tears of contrition, he vainly spends in deprecating an idle reproach: "Kill me," that it may not be said he died by a woman—a fit conclusion for such a life! The expectation of true and endless torment doth not so much vex him, as the frivolous report of a dishonour: neither is he so much troubled with Abimelech's frying in hell, as Abimelech is slain by a woman. So vain fools are niggardly of their reputation, and prodigal of their souls. Do we not see them run wilfully into the field, into the grave, into hell! and all lest it should be said, they have but as much fear as wit.

BOOK X.

CONTEMPLATION I.—JEPHTHAH.

ISRAEL, that had now long gone a whoring from God, hath been punished by the regiment of the concubine's son, and at last seeks protection from the son of a harlot. It is no small misery to be obliged unto the unworthy. The concubine's son made suit to them; they made suit to the son of the harlot. It was no fault of Jephthah that he had an ill mother, yet is he branded with the indignity of his bastardy. Neither would God conceal this blemish of nature, which Jephthah could neither avoid nor remedy. God, to show his detestation of whoredom, revenges it not only upon the actors, but upon their issue. Hence he hath shut out the base son from the congregation of Israel, to the tenth generation, that a transient evil might have a durable reproach attending it; and that after the death of the adulterer, yet his shame might live. But that God, who justly ties men to his laws, will not abide we should tie him to our laws, or his own: he can both rectify and ennoble the blood of Jephthah. That no man should be too much discouraged with the errors of his propagation, even the base son of man may be the lawfully begotten of God; and though he be cast out from the inheritance of his brethren upon earth, may be admitted to the kingdom of Israel.

I hear no praise of the lawful issue of Gilead; only this misbegotten son is commended for his valour, and set at the stern of Israel. The common gifts of God respect not the parentage or blood, but are indifferently scattered where he pleases to let them fall. The choice of the Almighty is not guided by our rules: as in spiritual, so in earthly things, it is not in him that willeth. If God would have men glory in these outward privileges, he would bestow them upon none but the worthy.

Now who can be proud of strength or greatness, when he sees him that is not so honest, yet is more valiant, and more advanced? Had not Jephthah been base, he had not been thrust out; and if he had not been thrust out from his brethren, he had never been the captain of Israel. By contrary paces to ours, it pleaseth God to come to his own ends: and how usually doth he look the contrary way to that he moves? No man can measure the conclusion of God's act by his beginning. He that fetches good out of evil, raises the glory of men out of their ruin. Men love to go the nearest way, and often fail. God commonly goes about, and in his own time comes surely home.

The Gileadites were not so forward to expel Jephthah, as glad to recall him. No Ammonite threatened them, when they parted with such a helper: now whom they cast out in their peace, they fetch home in their danger and misery. That God who never gave ought in vain, will find a time to make use of any gift that he hath bestowed upon men. The valour of Jephthah shall not rest in his secrecy, but be employed to the common preservation of Israel. Necessity will drive us to seek up all our helps, even those whom our wantonness hath despised.

How justly are the suits of our need upbraided with the errors of our prosperity! The elders of Gilead now hear of their ancient wrong, and dare not find fault with their exprobation: "Did ye not hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? how then come ye now to me in time of tribulation? The same expostulation that Jephthah makes with Gilead, God also at the same time makes with Israel: "Ye have forsaken me, and have served other gods; wherefore should I deliver you any more? Go, and cry unto the gods whom ye have served." As we, so God also finds it seasonable to tell his children of their faults, while he is whipping them. It is a safe and wise course, to make much of those in our peace, whom we must make use of in our extremity; else it is but just, that we should be rejected of those whom we have rejected.

Can we look for any other answer from God than this? Did ye not drive me out of your houses, out of your hearts, in the time of your health and jollity? Did ye not plead the strictness of my charge, and the weight of my yoke? Did not your wilful sins expel me from your souls? What do you now, crouching and creeping to me in the evil day? Surely, O God, it is but justice, if thou be not found of those which were glad to lose thee! It is thy mercy if, after many checks and delays, thou wilt be found at last. Where an act cannot be reversed, there is no amends, but confession; and if God himself take up with this satisfaction, "He that confesses, shall find mercy;" how much more should men hold themselves well paid, with words of humility and deprecation!

Jephthah's wisdom had not been answerable to his valour, if he had not made his match beforehand. He could not but know how treacherously Israel had dealt with Gideon. We cannot make too sure work, when we have to do with unfaithful men. It hath been an old policy to serve ourselves of men, and, after our advantage, to turn them up. He bargains therefore for his sovereignty, ere he win it: "Shall I be you head?" We are all naturally ambitious, and are ready to buy honour even with hazard. And if the hope of a troublesome superiority encouraged Jephthah to fight against the forces of Ammon, what heart should we take in the battles of God, against spiritual wickednesses, when the God of heaven hath said, "To him that overcomes, will I give power over nations, and to sit with me in my throne." O that we could bend our eyes upon the recompense of our reward! how willingly should we march forward against those mighty Ammonites! Jephthah is noted for his valour, and yet he treats with Ammon, ere he fights. To make war any other than our last remedy, is not courage, but cruelty and rashness. And now, when reason will not prevail, he betakes himself to his sword.

As God began the war with Jephthah, in raising up his heart to that pitch of fortitude; so Jephthah began his war at God, in craving victory from him, and pouring out his vow to him. His hand took hold of his sword, his heart of God; therefore he, whom the Old Testament styles valiant, the New styles faithful; he who is commended for his strength, dares trust in none but the arm of God: "If thou wilt give the Ammonites into my hand." If Jephthah had not looked upward for his victory, in vain had the Gileadites looked up to him. This is the disposition of all good hearts; they look to their sword, or their bow, as servants, not as patrons; and, whilst they use them, trust to God. If we could do so in all our business, we should have both more joy in their success, and less discomfort in their miscarriage. It was his zeal to vow; it was his sin to vow rashly. Jacob his forefather, of whom he learned to vow, might have taught him a better form; "If God will be with me, then shall the Lord be my God." It is well with vows, when the thing promised makes the promise good. But when Jephthah says, "Whatsoever thing cometh out of the doors of my house shall be the Lord's, or I will offer it for a burnt sacrifice;" his devotion is blind, and his good affection overruns his judgment. For what if a dog or a swine, or an ass had met him? where had been the promise of his consecration?

Vows are as they are made, like unto scents; if they be of ill composition, nothing offends more; if well tempered, nothing is more pleasant. Either certainty of evil, or uncertainty of good, or impossibility of performance, makes vows no service to God. When we vow what we cannot, or what we ought not do, we mock God instead of honouring him. It is a vain thing for us to go about to catch God hood-winked. The conscience shall never find peace in any way, but that which we see before us, and which we know safe, both in the kind and circumstances. There is no comfort in, peradventure I may please God. What good child will not take part of the parent's joy? If Jephthah return with trophies; it is no marvel if his daughter meet him with timbrels. O that we could be so affected with the glorious acts of our heavenly Father! Thou subduest thine enemies, and mightily deliverest thy people, O God: a song waiteth for thee in Sion.

Who would have suspected danger in a dutiful triumph? Well might Jephthah's daughter have thought, my sex forbade me to do any thing towards the help of my father's victory: I can do little, if I cannot applaud it. If nature have made me weak, yet not unthankful: nothing forbids my joy to be as stnong as the victor's. Though I might not go out with my father to fight, yet I may meet him with gratulations. A timbrel may become these hands which were unfit for a sword: this day hath made me the daughter of the head of Israel; this day hath made both Israel free, my father a conqueror, and myself in him noble; and shall my affection make no difference? What must my father needs think, if he shall find me sitting sullenly at home, whilst all Israel strives who shall run first to bless him with their acclamations? Should I only be insensible of his, and the common happiness?

And now, behold when she looks for most thanks, her father answers the measure of her feet with the knockings of his breast, and weeps at her music, and tears his clothes, to look upon her whom he best loved, and gives no answer to her timbrels, but, "Alas, my daughter, thou art of them that trouble me!" Her joy alone hath changed the day, and lost the comfort of that victory which she enjoyed to see won. It falls out often, that those times and occasions which promise most contentment, prove most doleful in the issue. The heart of this virgin was never lifted up so high as now, neither did any day of her life seem happy but this; and this only proves the day of her solemn and perpetual mourning. As contrarily, the times and events which we have most distrusted, prove most beneficial. It is good, in a fair morning, to think of the storm that may rise ere night, and to enjoy both good and evil fearfully.

Miserable is that devotion which troubles us in the performance. Nothing is more pleasant than the acts of true piety. Jephthah might well see the wrong of this religion, in the distaste of it: yet, while himself had troubled his daughter, he says, "Alas, my daughter, thou art of them that trouble me!" She did but her duty; he did what he should not: yet he would be rid of the blame, though he cannot of the smart. No man is willing to own a sin; the first man shifted it from himself to his wife; this, from himself to his daughter. He was ready to accuse another, which only committed it himself. It were happy, if we could be as loath to commit sin, as to acknowledge it.

The inconsideration of this vow was very tough and settled; "I have opened my mouth, and cannot go back." If there were just cause to repent, it was the weakness of his zeal to think that a vow could bind him to evil. An unlawful vow is ill made, but worse performed. It were pity this constancy should light upon any one but a holy object. No loan can make a truer debt than our vow; which if we pay not in our performance, God will pay us with judgment. We have all opened our mouths to God, in that initial and solemn vow of Christianity, O that we could not go back! So much more is our vow obligatory, by how much the thing vowed is more necessary.

Why was the soul of Jephthah thus troubled, but because he saw the entail of his new honour thus suddenly cut off? he saw the hope of posterity extinguished in the virginity of his daughter. It is natural to us to affect that perpetuity in our succession, which is denied us in our persons; our very bodies would emulate the eternity of the soul. And if God have built any of us a house on earth, as well as prepared us a house in heaven, it must be confessed a favour worth our thankfulness; but as the perpetuity of our earthly houses is uncertain, so let us not rest our hearts upon that, but make sure of the house which is eternal in the heavens.

Doubtless the goodness of the daughter added to the father's sorrow: she was not more loving, than religious; neither is she less willing to be the Lord's than her father's; and, as provoking her father to that which he thought piety, though to her own wrong, she says, "If thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do with me as thou hast promised." Many a daughter would have dissuaded her father with tears, and have wished rather her father's impiety, than her own prejudice; she sues for the smart of her father's vow. How obsequious should children be to the will of their careful parents, even in their final disposition in the world, when they see this holy maid willing to abandon the world, upon the rash vow of a father! They are the living goods of their parents, and must therefore wait upon the bestowing of their owners. They mistake themselves, which think they are their own. If this maid had vowed herself to God, without her father, it had been in his power to abrogate it; but now that he vowed her to God without herself, it stands in force. But what shall we say to those children, whom their parents' vow and care cannot make so much as honest,—that will be no other than godless in spite of their baptism and education? What but that they are given their parents for a curse, and shall one day find what it is to be rebellious?

All her desire is, that she may have leave to bewail that which she must be forced to keep, her virginity. If she had not held it an affliction, there had been no cause to bewail it; it had been no thank to undergo it, if she had not known it to be a cross. Tears are no argument of impatience; we may mourn for that we repine not to bear. How comes that to be a meritorious virtue under the gospel, which was but a punishment under the law? The daughters of Israel had been too lavish of their tears if virginity had been absolutely good. What injury should it have been, to lament that spiritual preferment which they should rather have emulated!

While Jephthah's daughter was two months in the mountains, she might have had good opportunity to escape her father's vow; but as one whom her obedience tied as close to her father, as his vow tied him to God, she returns to take up that burden which she had bewailed to foresee. If we be truly dutiful to our Father in heaven, we would not slip our necks out of the yoke, though we might, nor fly from his commands, though the door were open.

CONTEMPLATION II.—SAMSON CONCEIVED.

Of extraordinary persons, the very birth and conception is extraordinary; God begins his wonders betimes, in those whom he will make wonderful. There was never any of those which were miraculously conceived, whose lives were not notable and singular. The presages of the womb and the cradle, are commonly answered in the life: it is not the use of God to cast away strange beginnings. If Manoah's wife had not been barren, the angel had not been sent to her. Afflictions have this advantage, that they occasion God to show that mercy to us, whereof the prosperous are incapable. It would not beseem a mother to be so indulgent to a healthful child, as to a sick. It was to the woman that the angel appeared, not to the husband; whether for that the reproach of barrenness lay upon her more heavily than on the father, or for that the birth of the child should cost her more dear than her husband; or, lastly, for that the difficulty of this news was more in her conception than in his generation. As Satan lays his batteries ever to the weakest; so, contrarily, God addresseth his comforts to those hearts that have most need: as, at the first, because Eve had most reason to be dejected, for that her sin had drawn man into the transgression; therefore the cordial of God most respecteth her: "The seed of the woman shall break the serpent's head."

As a physician first tells the state of the disease with its symptoms, and then prescribes; so doth the angel of God first tell the wife of Manoah her complaint, then her remedy: "Thou art barren." All our afflictions are more noted of that God which sends them, than of the patient that suffers them; how can it be but less possible to endure any thing that he knows not, than that he inflicteth it not? He saith to one, Thou art sick; to another, Thou art poor; to a third, Thou art defamed; Thou art oppressed, to another. That all-seeing eye takes notice from heaven of every man's condition, no less than if he should send an angel to tell us he knew it. His knowledge, compared with his mercy, is the just comfort of all our sufferings. O God, we are many times miserable, and feel it not! thou knowest even those sorrows which we might have; thou knowest what thou hast done: do what thou wilt.

"Thou art barren." Not that the angel would upbraid the poor woman with her affliction; but therefore he names her pain, that the mention of her cure might be much more welcome. Comfort shall come unseasonably to that heart which is not apprehensive of his own sorrow. We must first know our evils, ere we can quit them. It is the just method of every true angel of God, first to let us see that whereof either we do, or should complain, and then to apply comforts: like as a good physician first pulls down the body, and then raises it with cordials. If we cannot abide to hear of our faults, we are not capable of amendment.

If the angel had first said, "Thou shalt conceive," and not premised. "Thou art barren;" I doubt whether she had conceived faith in her soul, of that infant which her body should conceive; now his knowledge of her present estate makes way for the assurance of the future. Thus ever it pleases our good God to leave a pawn of his fidelity with us; that we should not distrust him in what he will do, when we find him faithful in that which we see done.

It is good reason that he, which gives the son to the barren mother, should dispose of him, and diet him both in the womb first, and after in the world. The mother must first be a Nazarite, that her son may be so. While she was barren, she might drink what she would; but now, that she shall conceive a Samson, her choice must be limited. There is a holy austerity that ever follows the special calling of God. The world ling may take his full scope, and deny his back and belly nothing; but he that hath once conceived that blessed burden, whereof Samson was a type, must be strict and severe to himself; neither his tongue, nor his palate, nor his hand, may run riot. Those pleasures which seemed not unseemly for the multitude, are now debarred him. We borrow more names of our Saviour than one. As we are Christians, so we are Nazarites; the consecration of our God is upon our heads, and therefore our very hair should be holy. Our appetite must be curbed, our passions moderated, and so estranged from the world, that in the loss of parents, or children, nature may not make us forget grace. What doth the looseness of vain men persuade them that God is not curious, when they see him thus precisely ordering the very diet of his Nazarites? Nature pleads for liberty, religion for restraint; not that there is more uncleanness in the grape, than in the fountain; but that wine finds more uncleanness in us, than water; and that the high feed is not so fit for devotion, as abstinence. Who sees not a ceremony in this command? which yet carries with it this substance of everlasting use, that God and the belly will not admit of one servant; that quaffing and cramming is not the way to heaven. A drunken Nazarite is a monster among men. We have now more scope than the ancient: not drinking of wine, but drunkenness with wine is forbidden to the evangelical Nazarite; wine, wherein is excess. O that ever Christians should quench the Spirit of God with a liquor of God's own making! that they should suffer their hearts to be drowned with wine, and should so live, as if the practice of the gospel were quite contrary to the rule of the law.

The mother must conceive the only giant of Israel, and yet must drink but water; neither must the child touch any other cup. Never wine made so strong a champion, as water did here. The power of nourishment is not in the creatures, but in their Maker. Daniel and his three companions kept their complexion, with the same diet wherewith Samson got his strength; he that gave that power to the grape, can give it to the stream. O God, how justly do we raise our eyes from our tables unto thee, which can make water nourish, and wine enfeeble us!

Samson had not a better mother than Manoah had a wife; she hides not the good news in her own bosom, but imparts it to her husband. That wife hath learned to make a true use of her head, which is ever ready to consult with him about the messages of God. If she were made for his helper, he is much more her's. Thus should good women make amends for their first offence; that as Eve no sooner had received an ill motion, but she delivered it to her husband; so they should no sooner receive good, than they should impart it.

Manoah (like one which in those lewd times had not lost his acquaintance with God) so soon as he hears the news, falls down upon his knees. I do not hear him call forth and address his servants to all the coasts of heaven (as the children of the prophets did in the search of Elias) to find out the messenger; but I see him rather look straight up to that God which sent him; "My Lord, I pray thee, let that man of God come again." As a straight line is the shortest, the nearest cut to any blessing is to go by heaven: as we may not sue to God, and neglect means, so we must sue to God for those means which we shall use.

When I see the strength of Manoah's faith, I marvel not that he had a Samson to his son: he saw not the messenger, he heard not the errand, he examined not the circumstances; yet now he takes thought, not whether he should have a son, but how he shall order the son which he must have; and sues to God, not for the son, which as yet he had not, but for the direction of governing him when he should be. Zechariah had the same message, and, craving a sign, lost that voice wherewith he craved it. Manoah seeks no sign for the promise, but counsel for himself; and yet that angel spake to Zachary himself, this only to the wife of Manoah; that in the temple, like a glorious spirit; this, in the house, or field, like some prophet or traveller; that to the priest, this to the woman. All good men have not equal measures of faith: the bodies of men have not more differences of stature, than their graces. Credulity to men is faulty and dangerous; but, in the matters of God, is the greatest virtue of a Christian. Happy are they that have not seen, yet believed. True faith takes all for granted, yea, for performed, which is once promised.

He, that before sent his angel unasked, will much more send him again upon entreaty: those heavenly messengers are ready both to obey their Maker, and to relieve his children. Never any man prayed for direction in his duties to God, and was repulsed: rather will God send an angel from heaven to instruct us, than our good desires shall be frustrate.

Manoah prayed, the angel appeared again, not to him, but to his wife. It had been the shorter way to have come first to the man, whose prayers procured his presence. But as Manoah went directly and immediately to God, so God comes immediately and about to him; and will make her the means to bear the message to her husband, who must bear him the son: both the blessing and the charge are chiefly meant to her. It was a good care of Manoah, when the angel had given order to his wife alone for the governing of the child's diet to proffer himself to his charge; "How shall we order the child?" As both the parents have their part in the being of their children, so should they have in their education; it is both unreasonable and unnatural in husbands to cast this burden upon the weaker vessel alone: it is no reason that she, which alone hath had the pain of their birth, should have the pain of their breeding. Though the charge be renewed to the wife, yet the speech is directed to the husband; the act must be her's, his must be the oversight: "Let her observe all I commanded her." The head must overlook the body; it is the duty of the husband to be careful that the wife do her duty to God.

As yet Manoah saw nothing but the outside of a man, and therefore offers the angel an answerable entertainment, wherein there is at once hospitality and thankfulness. No man shall bring him good news from God and go away unrecompensed. How forward he is to feast him, whom he took for a prophet: Their feet should be so much more beautiful that bring us news of salvation, by how much their errand is better.

That Manoah might learn to acknowledge God in this man, he sets off the proffer of his thankfulness from himself to God, and (as the same angel which appeared to Gideon) turns his feast into a sacrifice. And now he is Manoah's solicitor to better thanks than he offered. How forward the good angels are to incite us unto piety! Either this was the Son himself, which said, "It was his meat and drink to do his Father's will," or else one of his spiritual attendants of the same diet. We can never feast the angels better, than with our hearty sacrifices to God. Why do not we learn this lesson of them, whom we propound to ourselves as patterns of our obedience? We shall be once like the angels in condition, why are we not in the meantime in our dispositions? If we do not provoke, and exhort one another to godliness, and do care more for a feast than a sacrifice, our appetite is not angelical, but brutish.

It was an honest mind in Manoah while he was addressing a sacrifice to God, yet not to neglect his messenger; fain would he know whom to honour. True piety is not uncivil, but, while it magnifies the author of all blessings, is thankful to the means. Secondary causes are worthy of regard; neither need it detract any thing from the praise of the agent, to honour the instrument. It is not only rudeness, but injustice in those which can be content to hear good news from God, with contempt to the bearers.

The angel will neither take nor give, but conceals his very name from Manoah. All honest motions are not fit to be yielded to; good intentions are not always sufficient grounds of condescent. If we do sometimes ask what we know not, it is no marvel if we receive not what we ask. In some cases, the angel of God tells his name unasked, as Gabriel to the virgin here, not by entreaty. If it were the angel of the covenant, he had as yet no name but Jehovah; if a created angel, he had no commission to tell his name; and a faithful messenger hath not a word beyond his charge. Besides that he saw it would be of more use for Manoah, to know him really, than by words. O the bold presumption of those men, which (as if they had long sojourned in heaven, and been acquainted with all the holy legions of spirits) discourse of their orders, of their titles, when this one angel stops the mouth of a better man than they, with "Why dost thou ask after my name, which is secret?" "Secret things belong to God; revealed to us and our children." No word can be so significant as actions. The act of the angel tells best who he was; he did wonderfully: Wonderful therefore was his name. So soon as ever the flame of the sacrifice ascended, he mounted up in the smoke of it; that Manoah might see the sacrifice and the messenger belonged both to one God, and might know both whence to acknowledge the message, and whence to expect the performance.

Gideon's angel vanished at his sacrifice, but this in the sacrifice; that Manoah might at once see both the confirmation of his promise, and the acceptation of his obedience, while the angel of God vouchsafed to perfume himself with that holy smoke, and carry the scent of it up into heaven. Manoah believed before, and craved no sign to assure him; God voluntarily confirms it to him above his desire: "To him that hath shall be given." Where there are beginnings of faith the mercy of God will add perfection.

How do we think Manoah and his wife looked to see this spectacle? They had not spirit enough left to look one upon another; but, instead of looking up cheerfully to heaven, they fall down to the earth upon their faces; as weak eyes are dazzled with that which should comfort them. This is the infirmity of our nature, to be afflicted with the causes of our joy, to be astonished with our confirmations, to conceive death in that vision of God, wherein our life and happiness consists. If this homely sight of the angel did so confound good Manoah, what shall become of the enemies of God, when they shall be brought before the glorious tribunal of the God of angels.

I marvel not now, that the angel appeared both times rather to the wife of Manoah; her faith was stronger of the two. It falls out sometimes that the weaker vessel is fuller, and that of more precious liquor. That wife is no helper, which is not ready to give spiritual comfort to her husband. The reason was good and irrefragable, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering from us." God will not accept gifts where he intends punishment, and professes hatred. "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the Lord." If we can find assurance of God's acceptation of our sacrifices, we may be sure he loves our persons. If I incline to wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but the Lord hath heard me.

CONTEMPLATION III.—SAMSON'S MARRIAGE.

Of all the deliverers of Israel, there is none of whom are reported so many weaknesses, or so many miracles, as of Samson. The news which the angel told of his conception and education, was not more strange than the news of his own choice; he but sees a daughter of the Philistines, and falls in love. All this strength begins in infirmity. One maid of the Philistines overcomes that champion, which was given to overcome the Philistines. Even he that was dieted with water, found heat of unfit desires. As his body was strong, notwithstanding that fare, so were his passions; without the gift of continency, a low feed may impair nature, but not inordination. To follow nothing but the eye in the choice of his wife, was a lust unworthy of a Nazarite; this is to make the sense not a counsellor but a tyrant.

Yet was Samson in this very impotency dutiful; he did not in the presumption of his strength ravish her forcibly; he did not make up a clandestine match, without consulting with his parents, but he makes suit to them for consent; "Give me her to wife." As one that could be master of his own act, though not of his passion; and as one that had learned so to be a suitor, as not to forget himself to be a son. Even in this deplored state of Israel, children durst not presume to be their own carvers; how much less is this tolerable in a well guided and Christian commonwealth? Whosoever now dispose of themselves without their parents, they do wilfully unchild themselves, and change natural affection for violent.

It is no marvel if Manoah and his wife were astonished at this unequal motion of her son. Did not the angel (thought they) tell us, that this child should be consecrated to God; and must he begin his youth in unholy wedlock? Did not the angel say, that our son should begin to save Israel from the Philistines; and is he now captived in his affections by a daughter of the Philistines? Shall our deliverance from the Philistines begin in an alliance? Have we been so scrupulously careful that he should eat no unclean thing, and shall we now consent to a heathenish match? Now therefore they gravely endeavour to cool this intemperate heat of his passion, with good counsel; as those which well knew the inconveniences of an unequal yoke; corruption in religion, alienation of affections, distraction of thoughts, connivance at idolatry, death of zeal, dangerous underminings, and lastly, an unholy seed. Who can blame them, if they were unwilling to call a Philistine daughter?

I wish Manoah could speak so loud, that all our Israelites might hear him; "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all God's people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" If religion be any other than a cypher, how dare we not regard it in our most important choice? Is she a fair Philistine? Why is not this deformity of the soul more powerful to dissuade us than the beauty of the face, or of metal to allure us? To dote upon a fair skin, when we see a Philistine under it, is sensual and brutish.

Affection is not more blind than deaf. In vain do the parents seek to alter a young man, not more strong in body than in will. Though he cannot defend his desires, yet he pursues them; "Get her, for she pleases me." And although it must needs be a weak motion that can plead no reason, but appetite; yet the good parents, since they cannot bow the affection of their son with persuasion, dare not break it with violence. As it becomes not children to be forward in their choice, so parents may not be too peremptory in their denial. It is not safe for children to overrun parents in settling their affections; nor for parents (where the impediments are not very material) to come short of their children, when the affections are once settled: the one is disobedience, the other may be tyranny.

I know not whether I may excuse either Samson in making this suit, or his parents in yielding to it, by a divine dispensation in both: for, on the one side, while the Spirit of God notes, that as yet his parents knew not this was of the Lord, it may seem that he knew it; and is it likely he would know and not impart it? This alone was enough to win, yea, to command his parents: it is not mine eye only, but the counsel of God that leads me to this choice. The way to quarrel with the Philistines, is to match with them. If I follow mine affection, mine affection follows God in this project. Surely he that commanded his prophet afterwards to marry a harlot, may have appointed his Nazarite to marry with a Philistine. On the other side, whether it were of God's permitting, or allowing, I find not. It might so be of God, as all the evil in the city; and then the interposition of God's decree shall be no excuse of Samson's infirmity. I would rather think that God meant only to make a treacle of a viper; and rather appointed to fetch good out of Samson's evil, than to approve that for good in Samson, which in itself was evil.

When Samson went on wooing, he might have made the sluggard's excuse, "There is a lion in the way;" but he that could not be stayed by persuasion, will not by fear. A lion young, wild, fierce, hungry, comes roaring upon him, when he had no weapon but his hand, no fence but his strength. The same providence that carried him to Timnah, brought the lion to him. It hath been ever the fashion of God to exercise his champions with some initiatory encounters: both Samson and David must first fight with lions, then with Philistines; and he, whose type they bore, meets with that roaring lion of the wilderness, in the very threshold of his public charge. The same hand that prepared a lion for Samson, hath proportionable matches for every Christian: God never gives strength, but he employs it. Poverty meets one like an armed man; infamy, like some furious mastiff, comes flying in the face of another: the wild boar out of the forest, or the bloody tyger of persecution, sets upon one; the brawling curs of heretical pravity, or contentious neighbourhood, are ready to bait another: and by all these meaner and brutish adversaries, will God fit us for greater conflicts. It is a pledge of our future victory over the spiritual Philistines, if we can say, My soul hath been among lions. Come forth now, thou weak Christian, and behold this preparatory battle of Samson. Dost thou now think God deals hardly with thee, in matching thee so hard, and calling thee forth to so many frays? What dost thou but repine at thine own glory? How shouldst thou be victorious, without resistance?

If the parents of Samson had now stood behind the hedge, and seen this encounter, they would have taken no further care of matching their son with a Philistine; for who, that should see a strong lion ramping upon an unarmed man, would hope for his life and victory? The beast came bristling up his fearful mane, wafting his raised stern, his eyes sparkling with fury, his mouth roaring out knells of his last passage, and breathing death from his nostrils, and now rejoicing at so fair a prey. Surely, if the lion had no other adversary than him whom he saw, he had not lost his hope, but now he could not see that his Maker was his enemy; "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson." What is a beast in the hand of the Creator? He that struck the lions with the awe of Adam, Noah, and Daniel, subdued this rebellious beast to Samson. What marvel is it if Samson now tore him, as if it had been a young kid? If his bones had been brass, and his skin plates of iron, all had been one. "The right hand of the Lord bringeth mighty things to pass."

If that roaring lion, that goes about continually seeking whom he may devour, finds us alone among the vineyards of the Philistines, where is our hope? Not in our heels; he is swifter than we: not in our weapons; we are naturally unarmed: not in our hands, which are weak and languishing: but in the Spirit of that God by whom we can do all things. If God fight in us, who can resist us? There is a stronger lion in us, than that against us.

Samson was not more valiant than modest; he made no words of this great exploit. The greatest performers ever make the least noise. He that works wonders alone could say, "See thou tell no man;" whereas those whose hands are most impotent, are busiest of their tongues. Great talkers show that they desire only to be thought eminent, whereas the deepest waters are least heard.

But, while he concealed this event from others he pondered it in himself; and when he returned to Timnah, went out of the way to see his dead adversary, and could not but recall to himself his danger and deliverance. Here the beast met me; thus he fought; thus I slew him! The very dead lion taught Samson thankfulness; there was more honey in this thought than in the carcass. The mercies of God are ill bestowed upon us, if we cannot step aside to view the monuments of his deliverances; dangers may be at once past and forgotten. As Samson had not found his honey-comb, if he had not turned aside to see his lion; so we shall lose the comfort of God's benefits, if we do not renew our perils by meditation.

Lest any thing should befall Samson, wherein is not some wonder, his lion doth more amaze him dead than alive; for lo! that carcass is made a hive, and the bitterness of death is turned into the sweetness of honey! The bee, a nice and dainty creature, builds her cells in an unsavoury carcass; that carcass, that promised nothing but stench and annoyance, now offers comfort and refreshing, and, in a sort, pays Samson for the wrong offered. O the wonderful goodness of our God, that can change our terrors into pleasure, and can make the greatest evils beneficial! Is any man, by his humiliation under the hand of God, grown more faithful and conscionable? There is honey out of the lion. Is any man by his temptation or fall become more circumspect? There is also honey out of the lion. There is no Samson to whom every lion doth not yield honey. Every Christian is the better for his evils; yea, Satan himself, in his exercise of God's children, advantageth them.

Samson doth not disdain these sweets, because he finds them uncleanly laid; his diet was strict, and forbade him any thing that savoured of legal impurity; yet he eats the honeycomb out of the belly of a dead beast. Good may not be refused, because the means are accidently evil. Honey is honey still though in a dead lion. Those are less wise and more scrupulous than Samson, which abhor the graces of God, because they find them in ill vessels. One cares not for the preacher's true doctrine, because his life is evil; another will not take a good receipt from the hand of a physician, because he is given to unlawful studies; a third will not receive a deserved contribution from the hands of a usurer. It is a weak neglect not to take the honey, because we hate the lion. God's children have right to their Father's blessings wheresoever they find them.

The match is now made; Samson (though a Nazarite) hath both a wedding and a feast. God never mislikes moderate solemnities in the severest life; and yet this bridal feast was long, the space of seven days. If Samson had matched with the best Israelite, this celebration had been no greater; neither had this perhaps been so long, if the custom of the place had not required it. Now I do not hear him plead his Nazaritism, for a colour of singularity. It is both lawful and fit, in things not prohibited, to conform ourselves to the manners and rites of those with whom we live.

That Samson might think it an honour to match with the Philistines, he, whom before the lion found alone, is now accompanied with thirty attendants: they called them companions, but they meant them for spies. The courtesies of the world are hollow and thankless; neither doth it ever purpose so ill, as when it shows fairest. None are so near to danger, as those whom it entertains with smiles. While it frowns, we know what to trust to; but the favours of it are worthy of nothing but fears and suspicion. Open defiance is better than false love.

Austerity had not made Samson uncivil; he knows how to entertain Philistines with a formal familiarity: and that his intellectual parts might be approved answerable to his arms, he will first try masteries of wit, and set their brains on work with harmless thoughts: his riddle shall oppose them, and a deep wager shall bind the solution; thirty shirts and thirty suits of raiment; neither their loss nor their gain could be much, besides the victory being divided unto thirty partners: but Samson's must needs be both ways very large, who must give or receive thirty alone. The seven days of the feast are expiring, and yet they, which had been all this while devouring of Samson's meat, cannot tell who that eater should be from whence meat should come. In the course of nature, the strong feeder takes in meat, and sends out filthiness; but that meat and sweetness should come from a devouring stomach, was beyond their apprehension.

And as fools and dogs use to begin in jest and end in earnest, so did these Philistines; and therefore they force the bride to entice her husband to betray himself. Coveteousness and pride have made them impatient of loss; and now they threat to fire her and her father's house, for recompense of their entertainment, rather than they will lose a small wager to an Israelite. Somewhat of kin to these savage Philistines, are those choleric gamesters, which if the dice be not their friend, fall out with God, curse (that which is not) fortune, strike their fellows, and are ready to take vengeance upon themselves: those men are unfit for sport, that lose their patience together with their wager.

I do not wonder that a Philistine woman loved herself and her father's family more than an Israelitish bridegroom; and if she bestowed tears upon her husband, for the ransom of them, Samson himself taught her this difference, "I have not told it my father or my mother, and should I tell it thee?" If she had not been as she was, she had neither done this to Samson nor heard this from him: matrimonial respects are dearer than natural. It was the law of Him that ordained marriage (before ever parents were), that parents should be forsaken for the husband or wife: but now Israelitish parents are worthy of more entireness than a wife of the Philistines; and yet whom the lion could not conquer, the tears of a woman have conquered. Samson never bewrayed infirmity but in uxoriousness. What assurance can there be of him that hath a Philistine in his bosom! Adam the most perfect man, Samson the strongest man, Solomon the wisest man, were betrayed with the flattery of their helpers. As there is no comfort comparable to a faithful yokefellow, so woe be to him that is matched with a Philistine.

It could not but much discontent Samson, to see that his adversaries had ploughed with his heifer, and that upon his own back; now therefore he pays his wager to their cost. Ascalon the city of the Philistines, is his wardrobe; he fetches thence thirty suits, lined with the lives of their owners. He might with as much ease have slain these thirty companions, which were the authors of this evil; but his promise forbade him, while he was to clothe their bodies, to unclothe their souls; and that Spirit of God, which stirred him up to revenge, directed him in the choice of the subjects. If we wonder to see thirty throats cut for their suits, we may easily know, that this was but the occasion of that slaughter, whereof the cause was their oppression and tyranny. David slew two hundred Philistines for their fore-skins; but the ground of this act was their hostility. It is just with God to destine what enemies he pleases to execution. It is not to be expostulated, why this man is stricken than another, when both are Philistines.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—SAMSON'S VICTORY.

I CAN no more justify Samson in the leaving of his wife, than in the choosing her; he chose her, because she pleased him; and because she despised him, he left her. Though her fear made her false to him in his riddle, yet she was true to his bed. That weak treachery was worthy of a check, not a desertion. All the passions of Samson were strong like himself; but (as vehement motions are not lasting) this vehement wind is soon allayed; and he is now returning with a kid to win her that had offended him, and to renew that feast which ended in her unkindness. Slight occasions may not break the knot of matrimonial love; and if any just offence have slackened it on either part, it must be fastened again by speedy reconciliation.

Now, Samson's father-in-law shows himself a Philistine, the true parent of her that betrayed her husband; for no sooner is the bridegoom departed, than he changes his son: what pretence of friendship soever he made, a true Philistine will soon be weary of an Israelite. Samson had not so many days' liberty to enjoy his wedding, as he spent in celebrating it. Marriage hath been ever a sacred institution, and who but a Philistine would so easily violate it! One of his thirty companions enjoys his wife, together with his suit, and now laughs to be a partner of that bed whereon he was an attendant. The good nature of Samson, having forgotten the first wrong, carried him to a proffer of familiarity, and is repulsed; but with a gentle violence, "I thought thou hadst hated her." Lawful wedlock may not be dissolved by imaginations, but by proofs.

Who shall stay Samson from his own wife! He that slew the lion in the way of his wooing, and before whom thousands of the Philistines could not stand, yet suffers himself to be resisted by him that was once his father-in-law, without any return of private violence.

Great is the force of duty, once conceived, even to the most unworthy. This thought (I was a son) binds the hands of Samson; else how easily might he, that slew those thirty Philistines for their suits, have destroyed this family for his wife? How unnatural are those mouths that can curse the loins from which they are proceeded, and those hands that dare lift up themselves against the means of their life and being!

I never read that Samson slew any but by the motion and assistance of the Spirit of God: and the divine wisdom hath reserved these offenders to another revenge. Judgment must descend from others to them, since the wrong proceeded from others by them. In the very marriage, God foresaw and intended this parting, and in the parting this punishment upon the Philistines. If the Philistines had not been as much enemies to God as to Samson—enemies to Israel in their oppression, no less than to Samson in this particular injury—that purpose and execution of revenge had been no better than wicked. Now he to whom vengeance belongs, sets him on work, and makes the act justice: when he commands, even very cruelty is obedience.

It was a busy and troublesome project of Samson, to use the foxes for his revenge: for not without great labour, and many hands, could so many wild creatures be got together; neither could the wit of Samson want other devices of hostility: but he meant to find out such a punishment as might in some sort answer the offence, and might imply as much contempt as trespass. By wiles, seconded with violence, had they wronged Samson, in extorting his secret, and taking away his wife: and what other emblems could these foxes tied together present unto them, than wiliness, combined by force, to work mischief?

These foxes destroy their corn, before he which sent them destroy the persons. Those judgments which begin in outward things, end in the owners. A stranger that had been of neither side, would have said, What pity it is to see good corn thus spoiled! If the creature be considered apart from the owners, it is good; and therefore if it be mispent, the abuse reflects upon the Maker of it; but if it be looked upon, with respect to an ill master, the best use of it is to perish. He therefore that slew the Egyptian cattle with murrain, and smote their fruit with hail-stones; he that consumed the vines of Israel with the palmer-worm, and caterpillar, and canker-worm, sent also foxes by the hand of Samson, into the fields of the Philistines. Their corn was too good for them to enjoy, not too good for the foxes to burn up. God had rather his creatures should perish any way, than serve for the lust of the wicked.

There could not be such secrecy in the catching of three hundred foxes, but it might well be known who had procured them. Rumour will swiftly fly of things not done: but of a thing so notoriously executed, it is no marvel if fame be a blab. The mention of the offence draws in the provocation; and now the wrong to Samson is scanned and revenged; because the fields of the Philistines are burned for the wrong done to Samson by the Timnite and his daughter, therefore the Philistines burn the Timnite and his daughter. The tying of the fire-brand between two foxes was not so witty a policy, as the setting a fire of dissension betwixt the Philistines. What need Samson be his own executioner, when his enemies will undertake that charge? There can be no more pleasing prospect to an Israelite, than to see the Philistines together by the ears.

If the wife of Samson had not feared the fire for herself and her father's house, she had not betrayed her husband; her husband had not thus plagued the Philistines: the Philistines had not consumed her and her father with fire: now she leaps into that flame which she meant to avoid. That evil which the wicked feared meets them in their flight. How many, in a fear of poverty, seek to gain unconscionably, and die beggars! How many, to shun pain and danger, have yielded to evil, and in the long run have been met in the teeth with that mischief which they had hoped to have left behind them! How many, in a desire to eschew the shame of men, have fallen into the confusion of God? Both good and evil are sure paymasters at the last.

He that was so soon pacified towards his wife, could not but have thought this revenge more than enough, if he had not rather wielded God's quarrel than his own: he knew that God had raised him up, on purpose to be a scourge to the Philistines, whom as yet he had angered more than punished. As if these therefore had been out-flourishes before the fray, he stirs up his courage, and strikes them both hip and thigh with a mighty plague. That God which can do nothing imperfectly, where he begins either mercy or judgment, will not leave till he have happily finished. As it is in his favours, so in his punishments, one stroke draws another.

The Israelites were but slaves, and the Philistines were their masters; so much more indignly therefore must they needs take it, to be thus affronted by one of their own vassals: yet shall we commend the moderation of these Pagans. Samson, being not mortally wronged by one Philistine, falls foul upon the whole nation: the Philistines, heinously offended by Samson, do not fall upon the whole tribe of Judah, but, being mustered together, call to them for satisfaction from the person offending. The same hand of God, which wrought Samson to revenge, restrained them from it. It is no thank to themselves, that sometimes wicked men cannot be cruel.

The men of Judah are by their fear made friends to their tyrants, and traitors to their friend; it was in their cause that Samson had shed blood, and yet they conspire with the Philistines to destroy their own flesh and blood. So shall the Philistines be quit with Israel, that as Samson by Philistines revenged himself of Philistines, so they of an Israelite by the hand of Israelites. That which open enemies dare not attempt, they work by false brethren; and these are so much more perilous, as they are more entire.

It had been no less easy for Samson to have slain those thousands of Judah that came to bind him, than those other of the Philistines that meant to kill him bound. And what if he had said, Are you turned traitors to your deliverer? Your blood be upon your own heads. But the Spirit of God (without whom he could not kill either beast or man) would never stir him up to kill his brethren, though degenerated into Philistines; they have more power to bind him than he to kill them. Israelitish blood was precious to him, that made no more scruple of killing a Philistine than a lion. That bondage and usury, that was allowed to a Jew from a Pagan, might not be exacted from a Jew.

The Philistines, that had before ploughed with Samson's heifer, in the case of the riddle, are now ploughing a worse furrow with a heifer more his own. I am ashamed to hear these cowardly Jews say: "Knowest thou not that the Philistines are lords over us? Why hast thou done this unto us? We are therefore come to bind thee." Whereas they should have said, We find these tyrannical Philistines to usurp dominion over us; thou hast happily begun to shake off their yoke, and now we are come to second thee with our service; the valour of such a captain shall easily lead us forth to liberty. We are ready either to die with thee, or to be freed by thee. A fearful man can never be a true friend; rather than incur danger, he will be false to his own soul. O cruel mercy of these men of Judah! "We will not kill thee, but we will bind thee, and deliver thee into the hands of the Philistines, that they may kill thee." As if it had not been much worse to die an ignominious and tormenting death, by the hands of the Philistines, than to be at once despatched by them, which wished either his life safe, or his death easy.

When Saul was pursued by the Philistines upon the mountain of Gilboa, he could say to his armour-bearer, "Draw forth thy sword, and kill me, lest the uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mock me;" and, at last, would rather fall upon his own sword than theirs: and yet these cousins of Samson can say, "We will not kill thee, but we will bind thee, and deliver thee." It was no excuse to these Israelites, that Samson's binding had more hope than his death. It was more in the extraordinary mercy of God, than their will, that he was not tied with his last bonds. Such is the goodness of the Almighty, that he turns the cruel intentions of wicked men to an advantage.

Now these Jews, that might have let themselves loose from their own bondage, are binding their deliverer, whom yet they knew able to have resisted. In the greatest strength, there is use of patience: there was more fortitude in this suffering than in his former actions. Samson abides to be tied by his own countrymen, that he may have the glory of freeing himself victoriously. Even so, O Saviour, our better Nazarite, thou which couldst have called to thy Father, and have had twelve legions of angels for thy rescue, would be bound voluntarily, that thou mightest triumph; so the blessed martyrs were racked, and would not be loosed, because they expected a better resurrection. If we be not as well ready to suffer ill, as to do good, we are not fit for the consecration of God.

To see Samson thus strongly manacled, and exposed to their full revenge, could not but be a glad spectacle to these Philistines; and their joy was so full, that it could not but fly forth of their mouths in shouting and laughter; whom they saw loose with terror, it is pleasure to see bound. It is the sport of the spiritual Philistines, to see any of God's Nazarites fettered with the cords of iniquity; and their imps are ready to say, Aha! so would we have it. But the event answers their false joy, with that clause of triumph, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy; though I fall, yet I shall rise again." How soon was the countenance of these Philistines changed, and their shouts turned unto shriekings! "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson;" and then, what are cords to the Almighty? His new bands are as flax burnt with fire; and he rouses up himself, like that young lion whom he first encountered, and flies upon those cowardly adversaries, who, if they had not seen his cords, durst not have seen his face. If they had been so many devils as men, they could not have stood before the Spirit which lifted up the heart and hand of Samson. Wicked men never see fairer prospect, than when they are upon the very threshold of destruction. Security and ruin are so close bordering upon each other, that, where we see the face of the one, we may be sure the other is at his back. Thus didst thou, O blessed Saviour, when thou wert fastened to the cross, when thou layest bound in the grave with the cords of death; thus didst thou miraculously raise up thyself, vanquish thine enemies, and lead captivity captive! Thus do all thy holy ones, when they seem most forsaken, and laid open to the insultation of the world, find thy Spirit mighty to their deliverance, and the discomfiture of their malicious adversaries.

Those three thousand Israelites were not so ill advised, as to come up into the rock unweaponed to apprehend Samson. Samson therefore might have had his choice of swords or spears for his skirmish with the Philistines; yet he leaves all the munition of Israel, and finding the new jawbone of an ass, takes that up in his hand, and, with that base instrument of death, sends a thousand Philistines to their place. All the swords and shields of the armed Philistines cannot resist that contemptible engine, which hath now left a thousand bodies as dead as the carcass of that beast whose bone it was. This victory was not in the weapon, was not in the arm; it was in the Spirit of God, which moved the weapon in the arm. O God, if the means be weak, yet thou art strong! Through God we shall do great acts; yea, I can do all things through him that strengtheneth me. Seest thou a poor Christian, which by weak council hath obtained to overcome a temptation; there is the Philistine vanquished with a sorry jawbone.

It is no marvel, if he were thus admirably strong and victorious, whose bodily strength God meant to make a type of the spiritual power of Christ. And, behold, as the three thousand of Judah stood still gazing, with their weapons in their hands, whilst Samson alone subdued the Philistines; so did men and angels stand looking upon the glorious achievements of the Son of God, who might justly say, "I have trode the winepress alone."

Both the Samsons complained of thirst. The same God, which gave this champion victory, gave him also refreshing; and by the same means. The same bone yields him both conquest and life, and is, of a weapon of offence, turned into a well of water. He that fetched water out of the flint for Israel, fetches it out of a bone for Samson. What is not possible to the infinite power of that Almighty Creator, that made all things of nothing! He can give Samson honey from the mouth of the lion, and water from the mouth of the ass. Who would not cheerfully depend upon that God, which can fetch moisture out of dryness, and life out of death.

CONTEMPLATION V.—SAMSON'S END.

I CANNOT wonder more at Samson's strength, than his weakness. He, that began to cast away his love upon a wife of the Philistines, goes on to mispend himself upon the harlots of the Philistines: he did not so much overcome the men, as the women overcame him. His affections blinded him first, ere the Philistines could do it: would he else, after the effusion of so much of their blood, have suffered his lust to carry him within their walls, as one that cared more for his pleasure than his life? O strange debauchedness, and presumption of a Nazarite! The Philistines are up in arms to kill him: he offers himself to their city, to their stews, and dares expose his life to one of their harlots whom he had slaughtered. I would have looked to have seen him betake himself to his stronger rock than that of Etam, and, by his austere devotion, to seek protection of Him of whom he received strength: but now, as if he had forgotten his consecration, I find him turned Philistine for his bed, and of a Nazarite scarce a man. In vain doth he nourish his hair, while he feeds these passions. How easily do vigour of body, and infirmity of mind, lodge under one roof! On the contrary, a weakish outside is a strong motive to mortification. Samson's victories have subdued him, and have made him first a slave to lewd desires, and then to the Philistines. I may safely say, that more vessels miscarry with a fair gale, than with a tempest.

Yet was not Samson blinded with lust, as not at all to look before him: he foresaw the morning would be dangerous: the bed of his fornication therefore could hold him no longer than midnight. Then he rises, and, in a mock of those ambushes which the Azzahites laid for him, he carries away the gates wherein they thought to have engaged him. If a temptation have drawn us aside, to lie down to sin, it is happy for us, if we can arise, ere we be surprised with judgment. Samson had not left his strength in the bed of a harlot, neither had that God, which gave it him, stripped him of it with his clothes, when he laid him down in uncleanness. His mercy uses not to take vantage of our unworthiness, but even, when we cast him off, holds us fast. That bountiful hand leaves us rich of common graces, when we have mispent our better store: like as our first parents, when they had spoiled themselves of the image of their Creator, yet were left wealthy of noble faculties of the soul.

I find Samson come off from his sin with safety; he runs away lightly with a heavier weight than the gates of Azzah, the burden of an ill act. Present impunity argues not an abatement of the wickedness of his sin, or of the dislike of God. Nothing is so worthy of pity, as sinners peace. Good is not therefore good because it prospers, but because it is commanded. Evil is not evil because it is punished, but because it is forbidden.

If the holy parents of Samson lived to see these outrages of their Nazarite, I doubt whether they did not repent them of their joy, to hear the news of a son. It is a shame to see how he, that might not drink wine, is drunk with the cup of fornications. His lust carries him from Azzah, to the plain of Sorek, and now hath found a Delilah that shall pay him for all his former uncleanness. Sin is steep and slippery; and if after one fall, we have found where to stand, it is the praise, not of our footing, but of the hand of God.

The princes of the Philistines knew already where Samson's weakness lay, though not his strength; and therefore they would entice his harlot by gifts to entice him, by her dalliance, to betray himself. It is no marvel, if she, which would be filthy, would be also perfidious. How could Samson choose but think, if lust had not bewitched him, She, whose body is mercenary to me, will easily sell me to others; she will be false, if she will be a harlot: a wide conscience will swallow any sin. Those that have once thralled themselves to a known evil, can make no other difference of sins, but their own loss, or advantage. A liar can steal; a thief can kill; a cruel man can be a traitor; a drunkard can falsify. Wickedness, once entertained, can put on any shape. Trust him in nothing, that makes not a conscience of every thing.

Was there ever such another motion made to a reasonable man? "Tell me wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mayest be bound to do thee hurt." Who would not have spurned such a suitor out of doors? What will not impudency ask, or stupidity receive? He that killed the thousand Philistines for coming to bind him, endures this harlot of the Philistines to consult with himself of binding him; and when, upon the trial of a false answer, he saw so apparent treachery, yet wilfully betrays his life by her to his enemies. All sins, all passions, have power to infatuate a man, but lust most of all. Never man, that had drunk flagons of wine, had less reason than this Nazarite. Many a one loses his life, but this casts it away; not in hatred of himself, but in love to a strumpet. We wonder that a man could possibly be so sottish, and yet we ourselves by temptation become no less insensate. Sinful pleasures, like a common Delilah, lodge in our bosoms; we know they aim at nothing but the death of our soul; we will yield to them, and die. Every willing sinner is a Samson; let us not inveigh against his senselessness, but our own. Nothing is so gross and unreasonable to a well-disposed mind, which temptation will not represent fit and plausible. No soul can, out of his own strength, secure himself from that sin which he most detesteth.

As a hood-winked man sees some little glimmering of light, but not enough to guide him; so did Samson, who had reason enough left him to make trial of Delilah, by a crafty misinformation; not enough upon that trial, to distrust and hate her; he had not wit enough to deceive her thrice, not enough to keep himself from being deceived by her. It is not so great wisdom to prove them whom we distrust, as it is folly to trust them whom we have found treacherous. Thrice had he seen the Philistines in her chamber, ready to surprise him upon her bonds; and yet will needs be a slave to his traitor. Warning not taken is a certain presage of destruction; and if, once neglected, it receive pardon, yet thrice is desperate.

What man would ever play thus with his own ruin? His harlot binds him, and calls in her executioners to cut his throat; he rises to save his own life, and suffers them to carry away theirs in peace. Where is the courage of Samson? where his zeal? He that killed the Philistines for their clothes, he that slew a thousand of them in the field at once in this quarrel, now suffers them in his chamber unrevenged. Whence is this? His hands were strong, but his heart was effeminate; his harlot had diverted his affection. Whosoever slackens the reins to his sensual appetite, shall soon grow unfit for the calling of God. Samson hath broke the green withes, the new ropes, the woof of his hair, and yet still suffers himself fettered with those invisible bonds of a harlot's love; and can endure her to say, "How canst thou say I love thee, when thy heart is not with me? Thou hast mocked me these three times;" whereas he should rather have said unto her, How canst thou challenge any love from me, that hast thus thrice sought my life? O, canst thou think my mocks a sufficient revenge of this treachery? But, contrarily, he melts at this fire; and, by her importunate insinuations, is wrought against himself. Weariness of solicitation hath won some to those actions, which at the first motion they despised; like as we see some suitors are despatched, not for the equity of the cause, but the trouble of the prosecution; because it is more easy to yield, not more reasonable. It is more safe to keep ourselves out of the noise of suggestions, than to stand upon our power of denial. Who can pity the loss of that strength which was so abused? Who can pity him the loss of his locks, which, after so many warnings, can sleep in the lap of Delilah? It is but just that he should rise up from thence shaven and feeble: not a Nazarite, scarce a man. If his strength had lain in his hair, it had been out of himself; it was not therefore in his locks, it was in his consecration, whereof that hair was a sign. If the razor had come sooner upon his head, he had ceased to be a Nazarite, and the gift of God had at once ceased, with the calling of God; not for the want of that excretion, but for want of obedience. If God withdraw his graces, when he is too much provoked, who can complain of his mercy? He that sleeps in sin must look to wake in loss and weakness. Could Samson think, Though I tell her, my strength lies in my hair, yet she will not cut it; or though she do cut my hair, yet shall I not lose my strength; that now he rises and shakes himself, in hope of his former vigour? Custom of success makes men confident in their sins, and causes them to mistake an arbitrary tenure for a perpetuity.

His eyes were the first offenders, which betrayed him to lust; and now they are first pulled out, and he is led a blind captive to Azzah, where he was first captivated to his lust. The Azzahites, which lately saw him, not without terror, running lightly away with their gates at midnight, see him now in his own perpetual night, struggling with his chains; and that he may not want pain, together with his bondage, he must grind in his prison.

As he passed the street, every boy among the Philistines could throw stones at him, every woman could laugh and shout at him; and what one Philistine doth not say, while he lashes him unto blood, There is for my brother, or my kinsman, whom thou slewest? Who can look to run away with a sin, when Samson a Nazarite is thus plagued? This great heart could not but have broken with indignation, if it had not pacified itself with the conscience of the just desert of all this vengeance.

It is better for Samson to be blind in prison, than to abuse his eyes in Sorek: yea, I may safely say, he was more blind when he saw licentiously, than now that he sees not; he was a greater slave when he served his affections, than now in grinding for the Philistines. The loss of his eyes shows him his sin; neither could he see how ill he had done, till he saw not.

Even yet, still the God of mercy looked upon the blindness of Samson, and in these fetters enlargeth his heart from the worst prison of his sin: his hair grew, together with his repentance, and his strength with his hair. God's merciful humiliations of his own are sometimes so severe, that they seem to differ little from desertions; yet, at the worst, he loves us bleeding: and when we have smarted enough, we shall feel it.

What thankful idolaters were these Philistines! They could not but know, that their bribes, and their Delilah, had delivered Samson to them, and yet they sacrifice to their Dagon; and, as those that would be liberal in casting favours upon a senseless idol, (of whom they could receive none,) they cry out, "Our god hath delivered our enemy into our hands." Where was their Dagon, when a thousand of his clients were slain with an ass's jaw? There was more strength in that bone, than in all the makers of this god; and yet these vain Pagans say, "Our god." It is the quality of superstition to misinterpret all events, and to feed itself with the conceit of those favours, which are so far from being done, that their authors never were. Why do not we learn zeal of idolaters? and if they be so forward in acknowledgment of their deliverances to a false deity, how cheerfully should we ascribe ours to the true! O God! whatsoever be the means, thou art the author of all our success. "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and tell the wonders that he doth for the sons of men!"

No musician would serve for this feast but Samson; he must now be their sport, which was once their terror; that he might want no sorrow scorn is added to his misery: every wit and hand plays upon him: Who is not ready to cast his bone and his jest at such a captive? So as doubtless he wished himself no less deaf, than blind, and that his soul might have gone out with his eyes. Oppression is able to make a wise man mad; and the greater the courage is, the more painful the insultation.

Now Samson is punished, shall the Philistines escape? If the judgment of God begin at his own, what shall become of his enemies? This advantage shall Samson make of their tyranny, that now death is no punishment to him: his soul shall fly forth in this bitterness, without pain; and that his dying revenge shall be no less sweet to him, than the liberty of his former life. He could not but feel God mocked through him; and therefore, while they are scoffing, he prays: his seriousness hopes to pay them for all those jests. If he could have been thus earnest with God in his prosperity, the Philistines had wanted this laughing stock. No devotion is so fervent, as that which arises from extremity; "O Lord God, I pray thee think upon me; O God, I beseech thee strengthen me at this time only." Though Samson's hair were shorter, yet he knew, God's hand was not. As one therefore that had yet eyes enough to see him that was invisible, and whose faith was recovered before his strength, he sues to that God, which was a party in this indignity, for power to revenge his wrongs, more than his own. It is zeal that moves him, and not malice. His renewed faith tells him, that he was destined to plague the Philistines; and reason tells him, that his blindness puts him out of the hope of such another opportunity. Knowing therefore that this play of the Philistines must end in his death, he re-collects all the forces of his soul and body, that his death may be a punishment, instead of a disport; and that his soul may be more victorious in the parting, than in the animation; and so addresses himself both to die and kill; as one whose soul shall not feel his own dissolution, while it shall carry so many thousand Philistines with it to the pit. All the acts of Samson are for wonder, not for imitation. So didst thou, O blessed Saviour, our better Samson, conquer in dying; and triumphing upon the chariot of the cross, didst lead captivity captive: the law, sin, death, hell, had never been vanquished but by thy death. All our life, liberty, and glory, springs out of thy most precious blood.

CONTEMPLATION VI.—MICAH'S IDOLATRY.

The mother of Micah hath lost her silver, and now she falls to cursing. She did afterwards but change the form of her god; her silver was her god, ere it did put on the fashion of an image, else she had not so much cursed to lose it, if it had not too much possessed her in the keeping. A carnal heart cannot forego that wherein it delights, without impatience; cannot be impatient without curses; whereas the man, that hath learned to enjoy God, and use the world, smiles at a shipwreck, and pities a thief, and cannot curse, but pray.

Micah had so little grace as to steal from his mother; and that out of wantonness, not out of necessity; for if she had not been rich, so much could not have been stolen from her: and now he hath so much grace as to restore it; her curses have fetched again her treasures. He cannot so much love the money, as he fears her imprecations. Wealth seems too dear, bought with a curse. Though his fingers were false, yet his heart was tender. Many that make not conscience of committing sin, yet make conscience of facing it: it is well for them that they are but novices in evil. Those, whom custom hath fleshed in sin, can either deny and forswear, or excuse and defend it: their seared heart cannot feel the gnawing of any remorse; and their forehead hath learned to be as impudent, as their heart is senseless.

I see no argument of any holiness in the mother of Micah: her curses were sin to herself, yet Micah dares not but fear them. I know not whether the causeless curse be more worthy of pity or derision; it hurts the author, not his adversary: but the deserved curses, that fall even from unholy mouths, are worthy to be feared: how much more should a man hold himself blasted with the just imprecations of the godly! What metal are those made of, that can applaud themselves in the bitter curses which their oppressions have wrung from the poor, and rejoice in these signs of their prosperity!

Neither yet was Micah more stricken with his mother's curses, than with the conscience of sacrilege: so soon as he finds there was a purpose of devotion in this treasure, he dares not conceal it, to the prejudice (as he thought) of God, more than of his mother. What shall we say to the palate of those men, which, as they find no good relish but in stolen waters, so best in those which are stolen from the fountain of God! How soon hath the old woman changed her note! Even now she passed an indefinite curse upon her son for stealing, and now she blesses him absolutely for restoring; "Blessed be my son of the Lord." She hath forgotten the theft, when she sees the restitution: how much more shall the God of mercies be more pleased with our confession, than provoked with our sin!

I doubt not but this silver and this superstition came out of Egypt, together with the mother of Micah. This history is not so late in time, as in place: for the tribe of Dan was not yet settled in that first division of the promised land: so as this old woman had seen both the idolatry of Egypt, and the golden calf in the wilderness, and, no doubt, contributed some of her ear-rings to that deity; and after all the plagues which she saw inflicted upon her brethren, for that idol of Horeb and Baal-peor, she still reserves a secret love to superstition, and now shows it. Where misreligion hath once possessed itself of the heart, it is very hardly cleansed out; but (like the plague) it will hang in the very clothes, and, after long lurking, break forth in an unexpected infection; and old wood is the aptest to take this fire. After all the airing in the desert, Micah's mother will smell of Egypt.

It had been better the silver had been stolen than thus bestowed; for now they have so employed it, that it hath stolen away their hearts from God; and yet, while it is molten into an image, they think it dedicated to the Lord. If religion might be judged according to the intention, there should scarce be any idolatry in the world. This woman loved her silver enough; and if she had not thought this costly piety worth thanks, she knew which way to have employed her stock to advantage.

Even evil actions have ofttimes good meanings, and these good meanings are answered with evil recompenses. Many a one bestows their cost, their labour, their blood, and receives torment instead of thanks.

Behold a superstitious son of a superstitious mother; she makes a god, and he harbours it! Yea, (as the stream is commonly broader than the head,) he exceeds his mother in evil: he hath a house of gods, an ephod, teraphim; and that he might be complete in his devotion, he makes his son his priest, and entails that sin upon his son which he received from his mother! Those sins which nature conveys not to us, we have by imitation. Every action and gesture of the parents is an example to the child; and the mother, as she is more tender over her son, so, by the power of a reciprocal love, she can work most upon his inclination. Whence it is, that, in the history of the Israelitish kings, the mother's name is commonly noted; and, as civilly, so also morally, the birth follows the belly. Those sons may bless their second birth, that are delivered from the sins of their education.

Who cannot but think how far Micah overlooked all his fellow Israelites, and thought them profane and godless in comparison of himself! How did he secretly clap himself on the breast, as the man whose happiness it was to engross religion from all the tribes of Israel, and little can imagine, that the further he runs, the more out of the way. Can an Israelite be thus paganish? O Micah, how hath superstition bewitched thee, that thou canst not see rebellion in every of these actions, yea, in every circumstance rebellion! What, more gods than one! a house of gods, besides God's house! an image of silver, to the invisible God! an ephod, and no priest! a priest, besides the family of Levi! a priest of thine own begetting, of thine own consecration! What monsters doth man's imagination produce, when it is forsaken of God! It is well seen there is no king in Israel. If God had been their king, his laws had ruled them; if Moses or Joshua had been their king, their sword had awed them; if any other, the courses of Israel had not been so heedless. We are beholden to government for order, for peace, for religion. Where there is no king, every one will be a king, yea, a god to himself. We are worthy of nothing but confusion, if we bless not God for authority.

It is no marvel, if Levites wandered for maintenance, while there was no king in Israel. The tithes and offerings were their due; if these had been paid, none of the holy tribe needed to shift his station. Even where royal power seconds the claim of the Levite, the injustice of men shortens his right. What should become of the Levites, if there were no king? and what of the church, if no Levites? No king, therefore no church. How could the impotent child live without a nurse? Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and queens thy nurses, saith God. Nothing more argues the disorder of any church, or the decay of religion, than the forced straggling of the Levites. There is hope of growth, when Micah rides to seek a Levite; but when the Levite comes to seek a service of Micah, it is a sign of gasping devotion.

Micah was no obscure man: all Mount Ephraim could not but take notice of his domestical gods. This Levite cold not but hear of his disposition, of his misdevotion; yet want of maintenance, no less than conscience, draws him on to the danger of idolatrous patronage. Holiness is not tied to any profession. Happy were it for the church, if the clergy could be a privilege from lewdness. When need meets with unconscionableness, all conditions are easily swallowed, of unlawful entrances, of wicked executions. Ten shekels, and a suit of apparel, and his diet, are good wages for a needy Levite. He that could bestow eleven hundred shekels upon his puppets, can afford but ten to his priest; so hath he at once a rich idol, and a beggarly priest. Whosoever affects to serve God cheap, shows that he makes God but a stale to mammon.

Yet was Micah a kind patron, though not liberal. He calls the young Levite his father, and uses him as his son; and what he wants in means, supplies in affection. It were happy, if Christians could imitate the love of idolaters towards them which serve at the altar. Micah made a shift with the priesthood of his own son; yet, that his heart checks him in it, appears both by the change, and his contentment in the change. "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, seeing I have a Levite to my priest." Therefore, while his priest was no Levite, he sees there was cause why God should not be good to him. If the Levite had not come to offer his service, Micah's son had been a lawful priest. Many times the conscience runs away smoothly with an unwarrantable action, and rests itself upon those grounds, which afterwards it sees cause to condemn. It is a sure way, therefore, to inform ourselves thoroughly ere we settle our choice, that we be not driven to reverse our acts with late shame, and unprofitable repentance.

Now did Micah begin to see some little glimpse of his own error: he saw his priesthood faulty; he saw not the faults of his ephod, of his images, of his gods: and yet (as if he had thought all had been well when he had amended one) he says, "Now I know the Lord will be good to me." The carnal heart pleases itself with an outward formality, and so delights to flatter itself, as that it thinks if one circumstance be right, nothing can be amiss.

Israel was at this time extremely corrupted; yet the spies of the Danites had taken notice even of this young Levite, and are glad to make use of his priesthood. If they had but gone up to Shiloh, they might have consulted with the ark of God; but worldly minds are not curious in their holy services. If they have a god, an ephod, a priest, it suffices them. They had rather enjoy a false worship with ease, than to take pains for the true. Those that are curious in their diet, in their purchases, in their attire, in their contracts, yet in God's business are very indifferent.

The author of lies sometimes speaks truth for an advantage; and, from his mouth, this flattering Levite speaks what he knew would please, not what he knew would fall out. The event answers his prediction, and now the spies magnify him to their fellows. Micah's idol is a god, and the Levite is his oracle. In matter of judgment, to be guided only by the event, is the way to error. Falsehood shall be truth, and Satan an angel of light, if we follow this rule. Even very conjectures sometimes happen right. A prophet, or a dreamer, may give a true sign or wonder, and yet himself say, "Let us go after other gods." A small thing can win credit with weak minds, which, where they have once sped, cannot distrust.

The idolatrous Danites are so besotted with this success, that they will rather steal than want the gods of Micah; and because the gods without the priest can do them less service than the priest without the gods, therefore they steal the priest with the gods. O miserable Israelites, that could think that a god which could be stolen!—that could look for protection from that which could not keep itself from stealing, which was won by their theft, not their devotion! Could they worship those idols more devoutly than Micah that made them? And if they could not protect their maker from robbery, how shall they protect their thieves? If it had been the holy ark of the true God, how could they think it would bless their violence, or that it would abide to be translated by rapine and extortion? Now their superstition hath made them mad upon a god; they must have him, by what means they care not, though they offend the true God by stealing a false. Sacrilege is fit to be the first service of an idol. The spies of Dan had been courteously entertained by Micah; thus they reward his hospitality. It is no trusting the honesty of idolaters; if they have once cast off the true God, whom will they respect?

It seems Levites did not more want maintenance, than Israel wanted Levites. Here was a tribe of Israel without a spiritual guide. The withdrawing of due means is the way to the utter desolation of the church: rare offerings make cold altars. There needed small force to draw this Levite to change his charge: "Hold thy peace, and come, and be our father and priest: whether is it better," &c. Here is no patience, but joy. He that was won with ten shekels, may be lost with eleven: when maintenance and honour call him, he goes undriven, and rather steals himself away, than is stolen. The Levite had too many gods, to make conscience of pleasing one. There is nothing more inconstant than a Levite that seeks nothing but himself.

Thus the wild-fire of idolatry, which lay before couched in the private hall of Micah, now flies furiously through all the tribe of Dan, who, like to thieves that have carried away plaguy clothes, have insensibly infected themselves and their posterity to death. Heresy and superstition have small beginnings, dangerous proceedings, pernicious conclusions. This contagion is like a canker, which at the first is scarce visible; afterwards it eats away the flesh, and consumes the body.

BOOK XI.

CONTEMPLATION I.—THE LEVITE'S CONCUBINE.

There is no complaint of a publicly disordered state, where a Levite is not at one end of it, either as an agent or a patient. In the idolatry of Micah and the Danites, a Levite was an actor: in the violent uncleanness of Gibeah, a Levite suffers. No tribe shall sooner feel the want of government than that of Levi.

The law of God allowed the Levite a wife; human connivance, a concubine: neither did the Jewish concubine differ from a wife, but in some outward compliments; both might challenge all the true essence of marriage. So little was the difference, that the father of the concubine is called the father-in-law to the Levite. She, whom ill custom had of a wife made a concubine, is now by her lust, of a concubine made a harlot; her fornication, together with the change of her bed, hath changed her abode. Perhaps her own conscience thrust her out of doors; perhaps the just severity of her husband. Dismission was too easy a penalty for that which God had sentenced with death. She that had deserved to be abhorred of her husband, seeks shelter from her father. Why would her father suffer his house to be defiled with an adulteress, though out of his own loins? Why did he not rather say, What, dost thou think to find my house an harbour for thy sins! While thou wert a wife to thine husband, thou wert a daughter to me; now thou art neither: thou art not mine, I gave thee to thy husband; thou art not thy husband's, thou hast betrayed his bed; thy filthiness hath made thee thine own, and thine adulterer's. Go seek thine entertainment where thou hast lost thine honesty: thy lewdness hath brought a necessity of shame upon thy abettors. How can I countenance thy person, and abandon thy sin? I had rather be a just man, than a kind father. Get thee home therefore to thy husband, crave his forgiveness upon thy knees, redeem his love with thy modesty and obedience; when his heart is once open to thee, my doors shall not be shut. In the mean time, know I can be no father to an harlot. Indulgence of parents is the refuge of vanity, the bawd of wickedness, the bane of children. How easily is that thief induced to steal, that knows his receiver! When the lawlessness of youth knows where to find pity and toleration, what mischief can it forbear!

By how much better this Levite was, so much more injurious was the concubine's sin. What husband would not have said, She is gone, let shame and grief go with her! I shall find one no less pleasing, and more faithful: or, if it be not too much mercy in me to yield to a return, let her that hath offended seek me. What more direct way is there to a resolved looseness, than to let her see I cannot want her! The good nature of this Levite cast off all these terms; and now after four months' absence, sends to seek for her that had run away from her fidelity; and now he thinks, She sinned against me; perhaps she hath repented; perhaps shame and fear have withheld her from returning; perhaps she will be more loyal for her sin. If her importunity should win me, half the thanks were lost; but now, my voluntary offer of favour shall oblige her for ever. Love procures truer servitude than necessity. Mercy becomes well the heart of any man, but most of a Levite. He that had helped to offer so many sacrifices to God, for the multitude of every Israelite's sins, saw how proportionable it was, that man should not hold one sin unpardonable. He had served at the altar to no purpose, if he, whose trade was to sue for mercy, had not at all learned to practise it.

And if the reflection of mercy wrought this in a servant, what shall we expect from him whose essence is mercy! O God, we do every day break the holy covenant of our love; we prostitute ourselves to every filthy temptation, and then run and hide ourselves in our father's house, the world! If thou didst not seek us up, we should never return; if thy gracious proffer did not prevent us, we should be incapable of forgiveness.

It were abundant goodness in thee to receive us, when we should intreat thee; but, lo, thou intreatest us that we should receive thee! How should we now adore and imitate thy mercy, since there is more reason we should sue to each other, than that thou shouldst sue to us; because we may as well offend as be offended.

I do not see the woman's father make any means for reconciliation; but, when remission came home to his doors, no man could entertain it more thankfully. The nature of many men is forward to accept, and negligent to sue for; they can spend secret wishes upon that which shall cost them no endeavour.

Great is the power of love, which can in a sort undo evils past; if not for the act, yet for the remembrance. Where true affection was once conceived, it is easily pieced again, after the strongest interruption. Here needs no tedious recapitulation of wrongs, no importunity of suit. The unkindnesses are forgotten, their love is renewed; and now the Levite is not a stranger, but a son; by how much more willingly he came, by so much more unwillingly he is dismissed. The four months' absence of his daughter is answered with four days' feasting; neither was there so much joy in the former wedding-feast, as in this; because then he delivered his daughter entire, now desperate; then he found a son; but now that son hath found his lost daughter, and he found both. The recovery of any good is far more pleasanter than the continuance.

Little do we know what evil is towards us. Now did this old man and this restored couple, promise themselves all joy and contentment, after this unkind storm; and said in themselves, Now we begin to live. And now this feast, which was meant for their new nuptials, proves her funeral. Even when we let ourselves loosest to our pleasures, the hand of God, though invisibly, is writing bitter things against us. Since we are not worthy to know, it is wisdom to suspect the worst, while it is least seen.

Sometimes it falls out, that nothing is more injurious than courtesy. If this old man had thrust his son and daughter early out of doors, they had avoided this mischief; now his loving importunity detains them to their hurt, and his own repentance. Such contentment doth sincere affection find in the presence of those we love, that death itself hath no other name but departing. The greatest comfort of our life is the fruition of friendship, the dissolution whereof is the greatest pain of death. As all earthly pleasures, so this of love, is distasted with the necessity of leaving. How worthy is that only love to take up our hearts, which is not open to any danger of interruption, which shall outlive the date even of faith and hope, and is as eternal as that God, and those blessed spirits, whom we love! If we hang never so importunately upon one another's sleeves, and shed floods of tears to stop their way, yet we must be gone hence; no occasion, no force, shall then remove us from our father's house.

The Levite is stayed beyond his time by importunity, the motions whereof are boundless and infinite; one day draws on another; neither is there any reason of this day's stay, which may not serve still for to-morrow. His resolution at last breaks through all those kind hinderances; rather will he venture a benighting, than an unnecessary delay. It is a good hearing, that the Levite makes haste home. An honest man's heart is where his calling is; such a one, when he is abroad, is like a fish in the air, whereinto if it leap for recreation or necessity, yet it soon returns to its own element. This charge, by how much more sacred it is, so much more attendance it expecteth: even a day breaks square with the conscionable.

The sun is ready to lodge before them: his servant advises him to shorten his journey, holding it more fit to trust an early inn of the Jebusites, than to the mercy of the night. And if that counsel had been followed, perhaps they, which found Jebusites in Israel, might have found Israelites in Jebus. No wise man can hold good counsel disparaged by the meanness of the author: if we be glad to receive any treasure from our servant, why not precious admonitions?

It was the zeal of this Levite that shut him out of Jebus; "We will not lodge in the city of strangers." The Jebusites were strangers in religion, not strangers enough in their habitation. The Levite will not receive common courtesy from those which were aliens from God, though home-born in the heart of Israel. It is lawful enough, in terms of civility, to deal with infidels; the earth is the Lord's, and we may enjoy it in the right of the owner, while we protest against the wrong of the usurper; yet the less communion with God's enemies, the more safety If there were another air to breathe in from theirs, another earth to tread upon, they should have their own. Those that affect a familiar entireness with Jebusites, in conversation, in leagues of amity, in matrimonial contracts, bewray either too much boldness, or too little conscience.

He hath no blood of an Israelite, that delights to lodge in Jebus. It was the fault of Israel, that an heathenish town stood yet in the navel of the tribes, and that Jebus was no sooner turned to Jerusalem: their lenity and neglect were guilty of this neighbourhood, that now no man can pass from Bethlehem-Judah to Mount Ephraim, but by the city of the Jebusites. Seasonable justice might prevent a thousand evils, which afterwards know no remedy but patience.

The way was not long betwixt Jebus and Gibeah; for the sun was stooping when the Levite was over against the first, and is but now declined when he comes to the other. How his heart was lightened, when he entered into an Israelitish city! and can think of nothing but hospitality, rest, security. There is no perfume so sweet to a traveller as his own smoke. Both expectation and fear do commonly disappoint us: for seldom ever do we enjoy the good we look for, or smart with a feared evil. The poor Levite could have found but such entertainment with the Jebusites. Whether are the posterity of Benjamin degenerated, that their Gibeah should be no less wicked than populous! The first sign of a settled godlessness, is that a Levite is suffered to lie without doors. If God had been in any of their houses, his servant had not been excluded. Where no respect is given to God's messengers, there can be no religion.

Gibeah was a second Sodom; even there also is another Lot; which is therefore so much more hospitable to strangers, because himself was a stranger. The host, as well as the Levite, is of Mount Ephraim. Each man knows best to commiserate that evil in others, which himself hath passed through. All that profess the name of Christ are countrymen, and yet strangers here below. How cheerfully should we entertain each other, when we meet in the Gibeah of this hospitable world!

This good old man of Gibeah came home late from his work in the fields; the sun was set ere he gave over: and now, seeing this man a stranger, an Israelite, a Levite, an Ephraimite, and that in his way to the house of God, to take up his lodging in the street, he proffers him the kindness of his house-room. Industrious spirits are the fittest receptacles of all good motions; whereas those which give themselves to idle and loose courses, do not care so much as for themselves. I hear of but one man at his work in all Gibeah; the rest were quaffing and revelling. That one man ends his work with a charitable entertainment; the other end their play in a brutish beastliness, and violence. These villains had learned both the actions and the language of the Sodomites: one unclean devil was the prompter to both; and this honest Ephraimite had learned of righteous Lot, both to entreat and to proffer. As a perplexed mariner, that in a storm must cast away something, although precious; so this good host rather will prostitute his daughter, a virgin, together with the concubine, than this prodigious villany should be offered to a man, much more to a man of God.

The detestation of a fouler sin drew him to overreach in the motion of a lesser; which if it had been accepted, how could he have escaped the partnership of their uncleanness, and the guilt of his daughter's ravishment! No man can wash his hands of that sin to which his will hath yielded. Bodily violence may be inoffensive in the patient; voluntary inclination to evil, though out of fear, can never be excusable: yet behold, this wickedness is too little to satisfy these monsters!

Who would have looked for so extreme abomination from the loins of Jacob, the womb of Rachel, the sons of Benjamin! Could the very Jebusites, their neighbours, be ever accused of such unnatural outrage! I am ashamed to say it, even the worst pagans were saints to Israel. What avails it, that they have the ark of God in Shiloh, while they have Sodom in their streets; that the law of God is in their fringes, while the devil is in their hearts! Nothing, but hell itself, can yield a worse creature than a depraved Israelite; the very means of his reformation are the fuel of his wickedness.

Yet Lot sped so much better in Sodom, than this Ephraimite did in Gibeah, by how much more holy guests he entertained: there the guests were angels, here a sinful man; there the guests saved the host, here the host could not save the guest from brutish violence; those Sodomites were stricken with outward blindness, and defeated; these Benjamites are only blinded with lust, and prevail. The Levite comes forth; perhaps his coat saved his person from this villany; who now thinks himself well, that he may have leave to redeem his own dishonour with his concubine's. If he had not loved her dearly, he had never sought her so far, after so foul a sin; yet now his hate of that unnatural wickedness overcame his love to her; she is exposed to the furious lust of ruffians, and, which he misdoubteth, abused to death.

O the just and even course, which the Almighty Judge of the world holds, in all his retributions! This woman had shamed the bed of a Levite by her former wantonness; she had thus far gone smoothly away with her sin; her father harboured her; her husband forgave her, her own heart found no cause to complain, because she smarted not: now, when the world had forgotten her offence, God calls her to reckoning, and punishes her with her own sin. She had voluntarily exposed herself to lust, now is exposed forcibly. Adultery was her sin, adultery was her death. What smiles soever wickedness casts upon the heart, while it solicits, it will owe us a displeasure, and prove itself a faithful debitor.

The Levite looked to find her humbled with this violence, not murdered; and now indignation moves him to add horror to the fact. Had not his heart been raised up with an excess of desire to make the crime as odious as it was sinful, his action could not be excused. Those hands, that might not touch a carcass, now carve the corpse of his own dead wife into morsels, and send these tokens to all the tribes of Israel; that when they should see these gobbets of the body murdered, the more they might detest the murderers. Himself puts on cruelty to the dead, that he might draw them to a just revenge of her death. Actions notoriously villanous, may justly countenance an extraordinary means of prosecution. Every Israelite hath a part in a Levite's wrong; no tribe hath not his share in the carcass and the revenge.

CONTEMPLATION II.—THE DESOLATION OF BENJAMIN.

These morsels could not choose but cut the hearts of Israel with horror and compassion; horror of the act, and compassion of the sufferer; and now their zeal draws them together, either for satisfaction or revenge. Who would not have looked that the hands of Benjamin should have been first upon Gibeah; and that they should have readily sent the heads of the offenders, for a second service, after the gobbets of the concubine! But now, instead of punishing the sin, they patronized the actors; and will rather die in resisting justice, than live and prosper in furthering it!

Surely, Israel had one tribe too many. All Benjamin is turned into Gibeah; the sons not of Benjamin, but of Belial. The abetting of evil is worse than the commission; this may be upon infirmity, but that must be upon resolution. Easy punishment is too much favour to sin; connivance is much worse: but the defence of it, and that unto blood, is intolerable. Had not these men been both wicked and quarrellous, they had not drawn their swords in so foul a cause. Peaceable dispositions are hardly drawn to fight for innocence; yet these Benjamites (as if they were in love with villany, and out of charity with God) will be the wilful champions of lewdness. How can Gibeah repent them of that wickedness which all Benjamin will make good, in spite of their consciences? Even where sin is suppressed, it will rise; but where it is encouraged, it insults and tyrannizes.

It was more just that Israel should rise against Benjamin, than that Benjamin should rise for Gibeah; by how much it is better to punish offenders, than to shelter the offenders from punishing: and yet the wickedness of Benjamin sped better for the time, than the honesty of Israel. Twice was the better part foiled by the less and worse; the good cause was sent back with shame, the evil returned with victory and triumph. O God, their hand was for thee in the fight, and thy hand was with them in their fall! They had not fought for thee, but by thee; neither could they have miscarried in the fight, if thou hadst not fought against them: thou art just and holy in both. The cause was thine; the sin in managing of it was their own. They fought in a holy quarrel, but with confidence in themselves; for, as presuming of victory, they ask of God, not what should be their success, but who should be their captain. Number and innocence made them too secure: it was just therefore with God to let them feel, that even good zeal cannot bear out presumption; and that victory lies not in the cause, but in the God that owns it.

Who cannot imagine how much the Benjamites insulted in their double field and day, and now began to think, God was on their side! Those swords, which had been taught the way into forty thousand bodies of their brethren, cannot fear a new encounter. Wicked men cannot see their prosperity a piece of their curse, neither can examine their actions, but the events. Soon after they shall find what it was to add blood unto filthiness, and that victory of an evil cause is the way to ruin and confusion.

I should have feared, lest this double discomfiture should have made Israel either distrustful, or weary of a good cause: but still I find them no less courageous with more humility. Now they fast and weep, and sacrifice. These weapons had been victorious in their first assault. Benjamin had never been in danger of pride for overcoming, if this humiliation of Israel had prevented the fight. It is seldom seen, but that which we do with fear prospereth; whereas confidence in undertaking, lays even good endeavours in the dust.

Wickedness could never brag of any long prosperity, nor complain of the lack of payment: still God is even with it at last. Now he pays the Benjamites both that death which they had lent to the Israelites, and that wherein they stood indebted to their brotherhood of Gibeah: and now, that both are met in death, there is as much difference betwixt those Israelites, and these Benjamites, as betwixt martyrs and malefactors. To die in a sin is a fearful revenge of giving patronage to sin. The sword consumes their bodies, another fire their cities, whatsoever became of their souls.

Now might Rachel have justly wept for her children, because they were not; for, behold, the men, women, and children of her wicked tribe, are cut off; only some few scattered remainders ran away from this vengeance, and lurked in caves, and rocks, both for fear and shame. There was no difference but life betwixt their brethren and them; the earth covered them both, yet unto them; doth the revenge of Israel stretch itself, and vows to destroy, if not their persons, yet their succession, as holding them unworthy to receive comfort by that sex to which they had been so cruel, both in act and maintenance. If the Israelites had not held marriage and issue a very great blessing, they had not thus revenged themselves of Benjamin: now they accounted the withholding of their wives a punishment second to death. The hope of life in our posterity, is the next contentment to an enjoying of life in ourselves.

They have sworn, and now, upon cold blood, repent them. If the oath were not just, why would they take it? and if it were just, why did they recant it? If the act were justifiable, what needed these tears? Even a just oath may be rashly taken. Not only injustice, but temerity of swearing, ends in lamentation. In our very civil actions, it is a weakness to do that which we would after reverse; but in our affairs with God, to check ourselves too late, and to steep our oaths in tears, is a dangerous folly. He doth not command us to take voluntary oaths; he commands us to keep them. If we bind ourselves to inconvenience, we may justly complain of our own fetters. Oaths do not only require justice, but judgment; wise deliberation, no less than equity.

Not conscience of their fact, but commiseration of their brethren, led them to this public repentance. "O God, why is this come to pass, that this day one tribe of Israel shall want!" Even the justest revenge of men is capable of pity. Insultation, in the rigour of justice, argues cruelty; charitable minds are grieved to see that done, which they would not wish undone: the smart of the offender doth not please them, which yet are thoroughly displeased with the sin, and have given their hands to punish it. God himself takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner, yet loves the punishment of sin: as a good parent whips his child, yet weeps himself. There is a measure in victory and revenge, if never so just, which to exceed, loses mercy in the suit of justice.

If there were no fault in their severity, it needed no excuse: and if there were a fault, it will admit of no excuse: yet, as if they meant to shift off the sin, they expostulate with God: "O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass this day!" God gave them no command of this rigour; yea, he twice crossed them in the execution; and now, in that which they entreated of God with tears, they challenge him. It is a dangerous injustice to lay the burden of our sins upon him, which tempteth no man, nor can be tempted with evil; while we so remove our sin, we double it.

A man that knew not the power of an oath, would wonder at this contrariety in the affections of Israel; they are sorry for the slaughter of Benjamin; and yet they slay those that did not help them in the slaughter. Their oath calls this to more blood: the excess of their revenge upon Benjamin may not excuse the men of Gilead. If every oath might look for a dispensation, this might plead it: now they dare not but kill the men of Jabesh-Gilead, lest they should have left upon themselves a greater sin of sparing than punishing. Jabesh-Gilead came not up to aid Israel, therefore all the inhabitants must die. To exempt ourselves, whether out of singularity or stubbornness, from the commôn actions of the church, when we are lawfully called to them, is an offence worthy of judgment. In the main quarrels of the church, neutrals are punished. This execution shall make amends for the former; of the spoil of Jabesh-Gilead shall the Benjamites be stored with wives. That no man may think these men slain for their daughters, they plainly die for their sin; and these Gileadites might not have lived without the perjury of Israel; and now, since they must die, it is good to make benefit of necessity. I inquire not into the rigour of the oath: if their solemn vow did not bind them to kill all of both sexes in Benjamin, why did they not spare their virgins? and if it did so bind them, why did they spare the virgins of Gilead? Favours must be enlarged in all these religious restrictions. Where breath may be taken in them, it is not fit nor safe they should be straitened.

Four hundred virgins of Gilead have lost parents, and brethren, and kindred, and now find husbands in lieu of them. An enforced marriage was but a miserable comfort fòr such a loss; like wards, or captives, they are taken, and choose not. These suffice not; their friendly adversaries consult for more upon worse conditions. Into what troublesome and dangerous straits do men thrust themselves, by either unjust or inconsiderate vows!

In the midst of all this common lawlessness of Israel, here was conscience made on both sides of matching with infidels. The Israelites can rather be content their daughters should be stolen by their own, than that the daughters of aliens should be given them. These men, which had not grace enough to detest and punish the beastliness of their Gileadites, yet are not so graceless as to choose them wives of the heathen. All but atheists, howsoever they let themselves loose, yet in some things find themselves restrained, and show to others that they have a conscience. If there were not much danger, and much sin in this unequal yoke, they would never have persuaded to so heavy an inconvenience. Disparity of religion, in matrimonial contracts, hath so many mischiefs, that it is worthy to be redeemed with much prejudice.

They which might not give their own daughters to Benjamiu, yet give others, while they give leave to steal them. Stolen marriages are both unnatural and full of hazard; for love, whereof marriage is the knot, cannot be forced; this was rather rape, than wedlock. What unlikeliness, perhaps contrariety of disposition, what averseness of affection may there be, in not only a sudden, but a forcible meeting! If these Benjamites had not taken liberty of giving themselves ease by divorcement, they would often have found leisure to rue this stolen booty. This act may not be drawn to example; and yet here was a kind of indefinite consent. Both deliberation and good liking, are little enough for a during estate, and that which is once done for ever.

These virgins come up to the feast of the Lord; and now, out of the midst of their dances, are carried to a double captivity. How many virgins have lost themselves in dances! And yet this sport was not immodest. These virgins danced by themselves, without the company of those which might move towards unchastity; for if any men had been with them, they had found so many rescuers as they had assaulters; now, the exposing of their weak sex to this injury provés their innocence. Our usual dances are guilty of more sin. Wantòn gestures, and unchaste touches, looks, motions, draw the heart to folly. The ambushes of evil spirits carry away many a soul from dances, to a fearful desolation.

It is supposed, that the parents, thus robbed of their daughters, will take it heavily. There cannot be a greater cross than the miscarriage of children; they are not only the living goods, but pieces of their parents: that they should therefore be torn from them by violence, is no less injury than the dismembering of their own bodies

CONTEMPLATION III.—NAOMI AND RUTH.

Betwixt the reign of the judges, Israel was plagued with tyranny, and, while some of them reigned, with famine. Seldom did that rebellious people want somewhat to humble them. One rod is not enough for a stubborn child. The famine must needs be great, that makes the inhabitants to run their country. The name of home is so sweet, that we cannot leave it for a trifle. Behold that land which had wont to flow with milk and honey, now abounds with want and penury: and Bethlehem, instead of an house of bread, is an house of famine. "A fruitful land doth God make barren, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." The earth bears not for itself, but for us; God is not angry with it, but with men. For our sakes it was first cursed to thorns and thistles, after that to moisture, and since that, not seldom to drought, and by all these to barrenness. We may not look always for plenty. It is a wonder, while there is such a superfluity of wickedness, that our earth is no more sparing of her fruits.

The whole earth is the Lord's, and in him ours. It is lawful for the owners to change their houses at pleasure. Why should we not make free use of any part of our own possessions? Elimelech and his family remove from Bethlehem-Judah unto Moab. Nothing but necessity can dispense with a local relinquishing of God's church; not pleasure nor profit, not curiosity. Those which are famished out, God calls, yea, drives from thence. The Creator and Possessor of the earth hath not confined any man to his necessary destruction.

It was lawful for Elimelech to make use of pagans and idolaters, for the supply of all needful helps. There cannot be a better employment of Moabites, than to be the treasurers and purveyors of God's children. Wherefore serve they, but to gather for the true owners? It is too much niceness in them, which forbear the benefit they might make of the faculties of profane or heretical persons; they consider not that they have more right to the good such men can do, than they that do it, and challenge that good for their own.

But I cannot see, how it could be lawful for his sons to match with the daughters of Moab. Had these men heard how far, and under how solemn an oath, their father Abraham sent for a wife of his own tribe, for his son Isaac? Had they heard the earnest charge of holy Isaac to the son he blessed, "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan?" Had they forgotten the plagues of Israel, for but a short conversation with the Moabitish women? If they plead remoteness from their own people, did they not remember how far Jacob walked to Padan-Aram? Was it further from Moab to Bethlehem, than from Bethlehem to Moab? And if the care of themselves led them from Bethlehem to Moab, should not their care of obedience to God have as well carried them back from Moab to Bethlehem? Yet if their wives would have left their idolatry with their maidenhead, the match had been more safe; but now, even at the last farewell, Naomi can say of Orpah, that she is returned to her gods. These men have sinned in their choice, and it speeds with them accordingly. Where did ever one of these unequal matches prosper? The two sons of Elimelech are swept away childless in the prime of their age, and, instead of their seed, they leave their carcasses in Moab, their wives widows, their mother childless and helpless amongst infidels, in that age which most needed comfort. How miserable do we find poor Naomi, which is left destitute of her country, her husband, her children, her friends, and turned loose and solitary to the mercy of the world! Yet even out of these hopeless ruins will God raise comfort to his servant. The first good news is, that God hath visited his people with bread; now therefore, since her husband and sons were unrecoverable, she will try to recover her country and kindred. If we can have the same conditions in Judah that we have in Moab, we are no Israelites if we return not. While her husband and sons lived, I hear no motion of retiring home; now these her earthly stays are removed, she thinks presently of removing to her country. Neither can we so heartily think of our home above, while we are furnished with these wordly contentments: when God strips us of them, straightways our mind is homeward.

She that came from Bethlehem under the protection of a husband, attended with her sons, stored with substance, resolves now to measure all that way alone. Her adversity had stripped her of all, but a good heart: that remains with her, and bears up her head, in the deepest of her extremity. True christian fortitude wades through all evils; and, though we be up to the chin, yet keeps firm footing against the stream: where this is, the sex is not discerned; neither is the quantity of the evil read in the face. How well doth this courage become Israelites, when we are left comfortless in the midst of the Moab of this world, to resolve the contempt of all dangers in the way to our home! As, contrarily, nothing doth more misbeseem a Christian, than that his spirits should flag with his estate, and that any difficulty should make him despair of attaining his best ends.

Goodness is of a winning quality wheresoever it is; and even amongst infidels, will make itself friends. The good disposition of Naomi carries away the hearts of her daughters-in-law with her, so as they are ready to forsake their kindred, their country, yea, their own mother, for a stranger, whose affinity died with her sons. Those men are worse than infidels, and next to devils, that hate the virtues of God's saints, and could love their persons well, if they were not conscionable.

How earnestly do these two daughters of Moab plead for their continuance with Naomi; and how hardly is either of them dissuaded from partaking of the misery of her society! There are good natures even among infidels, and such as, for moral disposition and civil respects, cannot be exceeded by the best professors. Who can suffer his heart to rest in those qualities, which are common to them that are without God!

Naomi could not be so insensible of her own good, as not to know how much comfort she might reap to the solitariness, both of her voyage and her widowhood, by the society of these two younger widows, whose affections she had so well tried; even every partnership is a mitigation of evils; yes, so earnestly doth she dissuade them from accompanying her, as that she could not have said more, if she had thought their presence irksome and burdensome. Good dispositions love not to pleasure themselves with the disadvantage of others; and had rather be miserable alone, than to draw in partners to their sorrow; for the sight of another's calamity doth rather double their own; and, if themselves were free, would affect them with compassion. As, contrarily, ill minds care not how many companions they have in misery, nor how few comforts in good; if themselves miscarry, they would be content all the world were enwrapped with them in the same distress.

I marvel not that Orpah is by this seasonable importunity persuaded to return from a mother-in-law, to a mother in nature; from a toilsome journey to rest; from strangers to her kindred; from a hopeless condition, to likelihoods of contentment. A little entreaty will serve to move nature to be good unto itself. Every one is rather a Naomi to his own soul, to persuade it to stay still, and enjoy the delights of Moab, rather than to hazard our entertainment in Bethlehem. Will religion allow me this wild liberty of my actions, this loose mirth, these carnal pleasures? Can I be a Christian, and not live sullenly? None but a regenerate heart can choose rather to suffer adversity with God's people, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

The one sister takes an unwilling farewell, and moistens her last kisses with many tears: the other cannot be driven back, but repels one entreaty with another; "Entreat me not to leave thee; for whither thou goest I will go, where thou dwellest I will dwell, thy people shall be my people, thy God my God, where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried." Ruth saw so much, upon ten years' trial, in Naomi, as was more worth than all Moab; and, in comparison whereof, all worldly respects deserved nothing but contempt. The next degree unto godliness is the love of goodness. He is in a fair way to grace, that can value it. If she had not been already a proselyte, she could not have set this price upon Naomi's virtue. Love cannot be separated from a desire of fruition: in vain had Ruth protested her affection to Naomi, if she could have turned her out to her journey alone. Love to the saints doth not more argue our interest in God, than society argues the truth of our love.

As some tight vessel that holds against wind and water, so did Ruth against all the powers of a mother's persuasions; the impossibility of the comfort of marriage, in following her, (which drew back her sister-in-law,) cannot move her. She hears her mother, like a modest matron, (contrary to the fashion of these times,) say, "I am too old to have a husband;" and yet she thinks not, on the contrary, I am two young to want a husband. It should seem, the Moabites had learned this fashion of Israel, to expect the brother's raising of seed to the deceased; the widowhood and age of Naomi cuts off that hope; neither could Ruth then dream of a Boaz that might advance her: it is no love that cannot make us willing to be miserable for those we affect. The hollowest heart can be content to follow one that prospereth. Adversity is the only furnace of friendship. If love will not abide both fire and anvil, it is but counterfeit; so, in our love to God, we do but crack and vaunt in vain, if we cannot be willing to suffer for him.

But if any motive might hope to speed, that which was drawn from example was most likely; "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back into her people, and to her gods; return thou after her." This one artless persuasion hath prevailed more with the world, than all the places of reason. How many millions miscarry upon this ground! Thus did my forefathers; thus did the most; I am neither the first nor the last, "Do any of the rulers?" We straight think that either safe or pardonable for which we can plead a precedent. This good woman hath more warrant for her resolution than another's practice. The mind can never be steady, while it stands upon others' feet, and till it be settled upon such grounds of assurance, that it will rather lead than follow; and can say with Joshua, whatsoever become of the world, "I and my house will serve the Lord."

If Naomi had not been a person of eminent note, no knowledge had been taken at Bethlehem of her return. Poverty is ever obscure; and those that have little may go and come without noise. If the streets of Bethlehem had not before used to say, There goes Naomi; they had not now asked, "Is not this Naomi?" She that had lost all things, but her name, is willing to part with that also; "Call me not Naomi, but call me Marah." Her humility cares little for a glorious name in a dejected estate. Many a one would have set faces upon their want, and, in the bitterness of their condition, have affected the name of beauty. In all forms of good, there are more that care to seem, than to be: Naomi hates this hypocrisy, and, since God hath humbled her, desires not to be respected of men. Those who are truly brought down, make it not dainty, that the world should think them so; but are ready to be the first proclaimers of their own vileness.

Naomi went full out of Bethlehem to prevent want, and now she brings that want home with her which she desired to avoid. Our blindness ofttimes carries us into the perils we seek to eschew. God finds it best, many times, to cross the likely projects of his dearest children, and to multiply those afflictions which they feared single.

Ten years have turned Naomi into Marah. What assurance is there of these earthly things whereof one hour may strip us! What man can say of the years to come, Thus I will be! How justly do we contemn this uncertainty, and look up to those riches that cannot but endure when heaven and earth are dissolved.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—BOAZ AND RUTH.

WHILE Elimelech shifted to Moab to avoid the famine, Boaz abode still at Bethlehem, and continued rich and powerful. He stayed at home, and found that which Elimelech went to seek and missed. The judgment of famine doth not lightly extend itself to all. Pestilence and the sword spare none; but dearth commonly plagueth the meaner sort, and baulketh the mighty. When Boaz's storehouse was empty, his fields were full, and maintained the name of Bethlehem. I do not hear Ruth stand upon the terms of her better education, or wealthy parentage; but now, that God hath called her to want, she scorns not to lay her hand unto all homely services, and thinks it no disparagement to find her bread in other men's fields. There is no harder lesson to a generous mind, nor that more beseems it, than either to bear want or to prevent it. Base spirits give themselves over to idleness and misery, and, because they are crossed, will sullenly perish.

That good woman hath not been for nothing in the school of patience; she hath learned obedience to a poor stepmother; she was now a widow past reach of any danger of correction; besides that, penury might seem to dispense with awe. Even children do easily learn to contemn the poverty of their own parents; yet hath she inured herself to obedience, that she will not so much as go forth into the field to glean without the leave of her mother-in-law, and is no less obsequious to Marah than she was to Naomi. What shall we say to those children that, in the main actions of their life, forget they have natural parents! It is a shame to see, that, in mean families, want of substance causeth want of duty; and that children should think themselves privileged for unreverence, because the parent is poor. Little do we know, when we go forth in the morning, what God means to do with us ere night. There is a providence that attends on us in all our ways, and guides us insensibly to his own ends: that divine hand leads Ruth blindfold to the field of Boaz. That she meets with his reapers, and falls upon his land, amongst all the fields of Bethlehem, it was no praise to her election, but the gracious disposition of Him in whom we move. His thoughts are above ours, and do so order our actions, as we, if we had known, should have wished. No sooner is she come into the field, but the reapers are friendly to her. No sooner is Boaz come into his field, but he invites her to more bounty than she could have desired. Now God begins to repay into her bosom her love and duty to her mother-in-law. Reverence and loving respects to parents, never yet went away unrecompensed. God will surely raise up friends among strangers to those that have been officious at home.

It was worth Ruth's journey from Moab, to meet with such a man as Boaz, whom we find thrifty, religious, charitable: though he were rich, yet he was not careless; he comes into the field to oversee his reapers. Even the best estate requires careful managing of the owner: he wanted no officers to take charge of his husbandry, yet he had rather be his own witness. After all the trust of others, the master's eye feeds the horse.

The Master of the great household of the world gives us an example of this care, whose eye is in every corner of his large possession. Not civility only, but religion, binds us to good husbandry. We are all stewards; and what account can we give to our Master, if we never look after our estate! I doubt whether Boaz had been so rich, if he had not been so frugal; yet was he not more thrifty than religious. He comes not to his reapers, but with a blessing in his mouth—"The Lord be with you;" as one that knew, if he were with them, and not the Lord, his presence could avail nothing. All the business of the family speeds the better, for the master's benediction. Those affairs are likely to succeed, that take their beginning at God. Charity was so well matched with his religion, without which, good words are but hypocrisy. No sooner doth he hear the name of the Moabitess, but he seconds the kindness of his reapers, and still he rises in his favours. First, she may glean in his field; then she may drink of his vessels; then she shall take her meal with his reapers, and part of it from his own hand; lastly, his workmen must let fall sheaves for her gathering. A small thing helps the needy. A handful of gleanings, a lapful of parched corn, a draught of the servants' bottles, a loose sheaf, was such a favour to Ruth, as she thought was above all recompense. This was not seen in the estate of Boaz, which yet makes her for the time happy. If we may refresh the soul of the poor with the very offals of our estate, and not hurt ourselves, woe be to us if we do it not. Our barns shall be as full of curses as of corn, if we grudge the scattered ears of our field to the hands of the needy.

How thankfully doth Ruth take these small favours from Boaz! Perhaps some rich jewel in Moab would not have been so welcome. Even this was a presage of her better estate. Those which shall receive great blessings, are ever thankful for little: and if poor souls be so thankful to us for but an handful, or a sheaf, how should we be affected to our God, for whole fields full, for full barns, full garners!

Doubtless Boaz, having taken notice of the good nature, dutiful carriage, and the near affinity of Ruth, could not but purpose some greater beneficence, and higher respects to her; yet now onwards he fits his kindness to her condition, and gives her that, which to her meanness seemed much, though he thought it little. Thus doth the bounty of our God deal with us. It is not for want of love that he gives us no greater measure of grace, but for want of our fitness and capacity. He hath reserved greater preferments for us, when it shall be seasonable for us to receive them.

Ruth returns home wealthy with her ephah of barley, and thankfully magnifies the liberality of Boaz, her new benefactor. Naomi repays his beneficence with her blessing—"Blessed be he of the Lord." If the rich can exchange their alms with the poor for blessings, they have no cause to complain of an ill bargain. Our gifts cannot be worth their faithful prayers: therefore it is better to give than to receive; because he that receives, hath but a worthless alms; he that gives, receives an invaluable blessing.

I cannot but admire the modesty and silence of these two women: Naomi had not so much as talked of her kindred in Bethlehem, nor till now had she told Ruth that she had a wealthy kinsman; neither had Ruth inquired of her husband's great alliance; but both sat down meekly with their own wants, and cared not to know any thing else, save that themselves were poor. Humility is ever the way to honour.

It is a discourtesy, where we are beholden, to alter our dependency, like as men of trade take it ill, if customers, which are in their books, go for their wares to another shop. Wisely doth Naomi advise Ruth not to be seen in any other field, while the harvest lasted. The very taking of their favours, is a contentment to those that have already well deserved; and it is quarrel enough that their courtesy is not received. How shall the God of heaven take it, that while he gives and proffers large, we run to the world, that can afford us nothing but vanity and vexation.

Those that can least act, are ofttimes the best to advise. Good old Naomi sits still at home, and by her counsel pays Ruth all the love she owes her. The face of that action, to which she directs her, is the worst piece of it; the heart was sound. Perhaps the assurance, which long trial had given her, of the good government and firm chastity of her daughter-in-law, together with her persuasion of the religious gravity of Boaz, made her think that design safe, which to others had been perilous, if not desperate. But besides that, holding Boaz next of blood to Elimelech, she made account of him as the lawful husband of Ruth; so as there wanted nothing but a challenge, and consummation. Nothing was abated but some outward solemnities, which, though expedient for the satisfaction of others, yet were not essential to marriage; and if there were not these colours for a project so suspicious, it would not follow that the action were warrantable, because Naomi's. Why should her example be more safe in this, than in matching her sons with infidels, than in sending back Orpah to her father's gods? If every act of an holy person should be our rule, we should have crooked lives. Every action that is reported, is not straightways allowed. Our courses were very uncertain, if God had not given us rules, whereby we may examine the examples of the best saints, and as well censure as follow them. Let them that stumble at the boldness of Ruth, imitate the continence of Boaz.

These times were not delicate. This man, though great in Bethlehem, lays him down to rest upon a pallet, in the floor of his barn; when he awakes at midnight, no marvel if he were amazed to find himself accompanied; yet, though his heart were cheered with wine, the place solitary, the night silent, the person comely, the invitation plausible, could he not be drawn to a rash act of lust; his appetite could not get the victory of reason, though it had wine and opportunity to help it. Herein Boaz showed himself a great master of his affections, that he was able to resist a fit temptation. It is no thank to many, that they are free of some evils; perhaps they wanted not will, but convenience. But if a man, when he is fitted with all helps to his sin, can repel the pleasure of sin out of conscience, this is true fortitude.

Instead of touching her as a woman, he blessed her as a father, encourageth her as a friend, promiseth her as a kinsman, rewards her as a patron, and sends her away laden with hopes and gifts; no less chaste, more happy than she came. O admirable temperance, worthy the progenitor of Him, in whose lips and heart was no guile!

If Boaz had been the next kinsman, the marriage had needed no protraction, but now that his conscience told him that Ruth was the right of another, it had not been more sensuality than injustice to have touched his kinswoman. It was not any bodily impotency, but honesty and conscience, that restrained Boaz; for the very next night she conceived by him; that good man wished his marriage-bed holy, and durst not lie down in the doubt of a sin. Many a man is honest out of necessity, and affects the praise of that which he could not avoid: but that man's mind is still an adulterer, in the forced continence of his body. No action can give us true comfort, but that which we do out of the grounds of obedience.

Those which are fearful of sinning, are careful not to be thought to sin: Boaz, though he knew himself to be clear, would not have occasion of suspicion given to others; "Let no man know that a woman came into the floor." A good heart is no less afraid of a scandal, than of a sin; whereas those that are resolved not to make any scruple of sin, despise others' constructions, not caring whom they offend, so that they may please themselves. That Naomi might see her daughter-in-law was not sent back in dislike, she comes home laden with corn. Ruth had gleaned more this night, than in half the harvest. The care of Boaz was, that she should not return to her mother empty. Love, wheresoever it is, cannot be niggardly. We measure the love of God by his gifts; how shall he abide to send us away empty from those treasures of goodness.

Boaz is restless in the prosecution of this suit, and hies him from his threshing-floor to the gate, and there convents the nearer kinsman before the elders of the city. What was it that made Boaz so ready to entertain, so forward to urge this match! Wealth she had none, not so much as bread, but what she gleaned out of the field; friends she had none, and those she had elsewhere Moabites; beauty she could not have much, after that scorching in her travel, in her gleanings. Himself tells her what drew his heart to her; "All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." Virtue, in whomsoever it is found, is a great dowry, and, where it meets with an heart that knows how to value it, is accounted greater riches than all that is hid in the bowels of the earth. The corn-heap of Boaz was but chaff to this, and his money dross.

As a man that had learned to square all his actions to the law of God, Boaz proceeds legally with his rival; and tells him of a parcel of Elimelech's land, which, it is like, upon his removal to Moab, he had alienated; which he, as the next kinsman, might have power to redeem; yet so, as he must purchase the wife of the deceased with the land. Every kinsman is not a Boaz; the man could listen to the land, if it had been free from the clog of a necessary marriage; but now he will rather leave the land than take the wife, lest, whiles he should preserve Elimelech's inheritance, he should destroy his own; for the next seed, which he should have by Ruth, should not be his heir, but his deceased kinsman's. How knew he whether God might not, by that wife, send heirs enough for both their estates? Rather had he therefore incur a manifest injustice, than hazard the danger of his inheritance. The law of God bound him to raise up seed to the next in blood; the care of his inheritance draws him to a neglect of his duty, though with infamy and reproach; and now he had rather his face should be spit upon, and his name should be called, "The house of him whose shoe was pulled off," than to reserve the honour of him, that did his brother right, to his own prejudice. How many are there that do so over-love their issue, as that they regard neither sin nor shame in advancing it, and that will rather endanger their soul, than lose their name! It is a woeful inheritance that makes men heirs of the vengeance of God.

Boaz is glad to take the advantage of his refusal; and holds that shoe (which was the sign of his tenure) more worth than all the lands of

Elimelech. And whereas other wives purchase their husbands with a large dowry, this man purchaseth his wife at a dear rate, and thinks his bargain happy. All the substance of the earth is not worth a virtuous and prudent wife! which Boas doth now so rejoice in, as if he this day only began to be wealthy.

Now is Ruth taken into the house of Boas; she, that before had said, she was not like one of his maidens, is now become their mistress. This day she hath gleaned all the fields and barns of a rich husband; and that there might be no want in her happiness, by a gracious husband, she hath gained a happy seed, and hath the honour, above all the dames of Israel, to be the great-grandmother of a king, of David, of the Messiah.

Now is Marah turned back again to Naomi; and Orpah, if she hear of this in Moab, cannot but envy at her sister's happiness. O the sure and bountiful payments of the Almighty! Who ever came under his wing in vain! Who ever lost by trusting him! Who ever forsook the Moab of this world for the true Israel, and did not at last rejoice in the change?

CONTEMPLATION V.—HANNAH AND PENINNAH.

ILL customs, where they are once entertained, are not easily discharged: polygamy, besides carnal delight, might now plead age and example, so as even Elkanah, though a Levite, is tainted with the sin of Lamech, like as fashions of attire, which at the first were disliked as uncomely, yet, when they are once grown common, are taken up of the gravest. Yet this sin, as then current with the time, could not make Elkanah not religious. The house of God in Shiloh was duly frequented of him; oftentimes alone, in his ordinary course of attendance, with all his males thrice a year, and once a year with all his family. The continuance of an unknown sin cannot hinder the uprightness of a man's heart with God; as a man may have a mole upon his back, and yet think his skin clear; the least touch of knowledge or wilfulness mars his sincerity.

He, that by virtue of his place was employed about the sacrifices of others, would much less neglect his own. It is a shame for him, that teaches God's people that they should not appear before the Lord empty, to bring no sacrifice for himself. If Levites be profane, who should be religious!

It was the fashion, when they sacrificed, to feast: so did Elkanah; the day of his devotion is the day of his triumph; he makes great cheer for his whole family, even for that wife which he loved less. There is nothing more comely than cheerfulness in the services of God. What is there in all the world, wherewith the heart of man should be so lift up, as with the conscience of his duty done to his Maker! While we do so, God doth to us, as our glass, smile upon us, while we smile on him.

Love will be seen by entertainment; Peninnah and her children shall not complain of want, but Hannah shall find her husband's affection in her portion; as his love to her was double, so was her part: she fared not the worse because she was childless. No good husband will dislike his wife for a fault out of the power of her redress; yea, rather, that which might seem to lose the love of her husband, wins it, her barrenness. The good nature of Elkanah laboured, by his dear respects, to recompense this affliction; that so she might find no less contentment in the fruit of his hearty love, than she had grief from her own fruitlessness. It is the property of true mercy, to be most favourable to the weakest; thus doth the gracious spouse of the Christian soul pity the barrenness of his servants. O Saviour, we should not find thee so indulgent to us, if we did not complain of our own unworthiness! Peninnah may have the more children, but barren Hannah hath the most love. How much rather could Elkanah have wished Peninnah barren, and Hannah fruitful! But if she should have had both issue and love, she had been proud, and her rival despised. God knows how to disperse his favours so, that every one may have cause both of thankfulness and humiliation; while there is no one that hath all, no one but hath some. If envy and contempt were not thus equally tempered, some would be over-haughty, and others too miserable; but now every man sees that in himself which is worthy of contempt, and matter of emulation in others; and, contrarily, sees what to pity and dislike in the most eminent, and what to applaud in himself; and out of this contrariety, arises a sweet mean of contentation.

The love of Elkanah is so unable to free Hannah from the wrongs of her rival, that it procures them rather. The unfruitfulness of Hannah had never with so much despite been laid in her dish, if her husband's heart had been as barren of love to her. Envy, though it take advantage of our weaknesses, yet is ever raised upon some grounds of happiness in them whom it emulates; it is ever an ill effect of a good cause. If Abel's sacrifice had not been accepted, and if the acceptation of his sacrifice had not been a blessing, no envy had followed upon it.

There is no evil of another, wherein it is fit to rejoice, but his envy, and this is worthy of our joy and thankfulness; because it shows us the price of that good which we had, and valued not. The malignity of envy is thus well answered, when it is made the evil cause of a good effect to us, when God and our souls may gain by another's sin. I do not find that Hannah insulted upon Peninnah, for the greater measure or her husband's love, as Peninnah did upon her for her fruitlessness. Those that are truly gracious, know how to receive the blessings of God, without contempt of them that want; and have learned to be thankful without overliness.

Envy, when it is once conceived in a malicious heart, is like fire in billets of juniper, which, they say, continues more years than one. Every year was Hannah thus vexed with her emulous partner, and troubled both in her prayers and meals. Amidst all their feastings, she fed on nothing but her tears. Some dispositions are less sensible, and more careless of the despite and injuries of others, and can turn over unkind usages with contempt. By how much more tender the heart is, so much more deeply is it ever affected with discourtesies: as wax receives and retains that impression, which in the hard clay cannot be seen; or, as the eye feels that mote, which the skin of the eye-lid could not complain of; yet the husband of Hannah, as one that knew his duty, labours, by his love, to comfort her against these discontentments; "Why weepest thou? Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" It is the weakness of good natures to give so much advantage to an enemy. What would malice rather have, than the vexation of them whom it persecutes? We cannot better please an adversary, than by hurting ourselves. This is no other than to humour envy, to serve the turn of those that malign us, and to draw on that malice whereof we are weary; whereas carelessness puts ill-will out of countenance, and makes it withdraw itself in a rage, as that which doth but shame the author, without the hurt of the patient. In causeless wrongs, the best remedy is contempt.

She, that could not find comfort in the loving persuasions of her husband, seeks it in her prayers; she rises up hungry from the feast, and hastens to the temple, there she pours out her tears and supplications. Whatsoever the complaint be, here is the remedy. There is one universal receipt for all evils, prayer; when all helps fail us, this remains, and while we have an heart, comforts it.

Here was not more bitterness in the soul of Hannah, than fervency; she did not only weep and pray, but vow unto God: if God will give her a son, she will give her son to God back again. Even nature itself had consecrated her son to God; for he could not but be born a Levite: but if his birth make him a Levite, her vow shall make him a Nazarite, and dedicate his minority to the tabernacle. The way to obtain any benefit, is to devote it, in our hearts, to the glory of that God of whom we ask it: by this means shall God both pleasure his servant, and honour himself; whereas, if the scope of our desires be carnal, we may be sure either to fail of our suit, or of a blessing.

CONTEMPLATION VI.—ELI AND HANNAH.

OLD Eli sits on a stool by one of the posts of the tabernacle. Where should the priests of God be but in the temple? Whether for action or for oversight. Their very presence keeps God's house in order, and the presence of God keeps their hearts in order.

It is oft found, that those which are themselves conscionable, are too forward to the censuring of others. Good Eli, because he marks the lips of Hannah to move without noise, chides her as drunken, and uncharitably misconstrues her devotion. It was a weak ground whereon to build so heavy a sentence. If she had spoken too loud and incomposedly, he might have had some just colour for this conceit; but now, to accuse her silence, notwithstanding all her tears which he saw, of drunkenness, it was a zealous breach of charity.

Some spirit would have been enraged with so rash a censure. When anger meets with grief, both turn into fury. But this good woman had been inured to reproaches, and besides, did well see the reproof arose from misprision, and the misprision from zeal; and therefore answers meekly, as one that had rather satisfy than expostulate; "Nay, my lord, but I am a woman troubled in spirit." Eli may now learn charity of Hannah. If she had been in that distemper, whereof he accused her, his just reproof had not been so easily digested. Guiltiness is commonly clamorous and impatient, whereas innocence, is silent and careless of misreports. It is natural unto all men to wipe off from their name all aspersions of evil, but none do it with such violence as they which are faulty. It is a sign the horse is galled, that stirs too much when he is touched.

She, that was censured for drunken, censures drunkenness more deeply than her reprover; "Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial." The drunkard's style begins in lawlessness, proceeds in unprofitableness, ends in misery; and all shut up in the denomination of this pedigree, a son of Belial.

If Hannah had been tainted with this sin, she would have denied it with more fervour, and have disclaimed it with an extenuation; what if I should have been merry with wine? yet I might be devout. If I should have overjoyed in my sacrifice to God, one cup of excess had not been so heinous: now her freedom is seen in her severity. Those, which have clear hearts from any sin, prosecute it with rigour, whereas the guilty are ever partial: their conscience holds their hands, and tells them that they beat themselves while they punish others.

Now Eli sees his error, and recants it; and, to make amends for his rash censure, prays for her. Even the best may err, but not persist in it. When good natures have offended, they are unquiet till they have hastened satisfaction. This was within his office, to pray for the distressed: wherefore serves the priest, but to sacrifice for the people? And the best sacrifices are the prayers of faith.

She that began her prayers with fasting and heaviness, rises up from them with cheerfulnes and repast. It cannot be spoken how much ease and joy the heart of man finds in having unloaded his cares, and poured out his supplications into the ears of God; since it is well assured, that the suit, which is faithfully asked, is already granted in heaven. The conscience may well rest, when it tells us, that we have neglected no means of redressing our affliction; for then it may resolve to look either for amendment, or patience.

The sacrifice is ended, and now Elkanah and his family rise up early to return unto Ramah; but they dare not set forward, till they have worshipped before the Lord. That journey cannot hope to prosper, that takes no God with it. The way to receive blessings at home, is to be devout at the temple.

She that before conceived faith in her heart, now conceives a son in her womb. God will rather work miracles, than faithful prayers shall return empty. I do not find that Peninnah asked any son of God, yet she had store; Hannah begged hard for this one, and could not till now obtain him. They which are dearest to God, do ofttimes, with great difficulty, work out those blessings, which fall into the mouths of the careless. That wise Disposer of all things knows it fit to hold us short of those favours which we sue for; whether for the trial of our patience, or the exercise of our faith, or the increase of our importunity, or the doubling of our obligation.

Those children are most like to prove blessings, which the parents have begged of God, and which are no less the fruit of our supplications than of our body. As this child was the son of his mother's prayers, and was consecrated to God ere his possibility of being; so now himself shall know, both how he came, and whereto he was ordained; and, lest he should forget it, his very name shall teach him both; "She called his name Samuel." He cannot so much as hear himself named, but he must needs remember both the extraordinary mercy of God, in giving him to a barren mother, and the vow of his mother, in restoring him back to God by her zealous dedication; and by both of them learn holiness and obedience. There is no necessity of significant names; but we cannot have too many monitors to put us in mind of our duty.

It is wont to be the father's privilege to name his child; but because this was his mother's son, begotten more by her prayers than the seed of Elkanah, it was but reason that she should have the chief hand both in his name and disposing. It had been indeed in the power of Elkanah to have changed both his name and profession, and abrogate the vow of his wife; that wives might know they were not their own, and that the rib might learn to know the head; but husbands shall abuse their authority, if they shall wilfully cross the holy purposes and religious endeavours of their yoke-fellows. How much more fit is it for them to cherish all good desires in the weaker vessels, and, as we use, when we carry a small light in a wind, to hide it with our lap, or hand, that it may not go out. If the wife be a vine, the husband should be an elm, to uphold her in all worthy enterprises, else she falls to the ground, and proves fruitless.

The year is now come about; and Elkanah calls his family to their holy journey, to go up to Jerusalem, for the anniversary solemnity of their sacrifice. Hannah's heart is with them, but she hath a good excuse to stay at home, the charge of her Samuel: her success in the temple, keeps her happily from the temple, that her devotion may be doubled, because it was respited. God knows how to dispense with necessities; but if we suffer idle and needless occasions to hold us from the tabernacle of God, our hearts are but hollow to religion.

Now, at last, when the child was weaned from her hand, she goes up and pays her vow, and with it pays the interest of her intermission. Never did Hannah go up with so glad a heart to Shiloh, as now that she carries God this reasonable present, which himself gave to her, and she vowed to him! accompanied with the bounty of other sacrifices, more in number and measure, than the law of God required of her; and all this is too little for her God, that so mercifully remembered her affliction, and miraculously remedied it. Those hearts which are truly thankful, do no less rejoice in repayment, than in their receipt; and do as much study how to show their humble and fervent affections for what they have, as how to compass favours when they want them; their debt is their burden, which, when they have discharged, they are at ease.

If Hannah had repented of her vow, and not presented her son to the tabernacle, Eli could not have challenged him: he had only seen her lips stir, not hearing the promise of her heart. It was enough that her own soul knew her vow, and God, which was greater than it. The obligation of a secret vow is no less, than if it had ten thousand witnesses.

Old Eli could not choose but much rejoice to see this fruit of those lips, which he thought moved with wine; and this good proof, both of the merciful audience of God, and the thankful fidelity of his handmaid:

this sight calls him down to his knees, "He worshipped the Lord." We are unprofitable witnesses of the mercies of God and the graces of men, if we do not glorify him for others' sakes, no less than for our own.

Eli and Hannah grew now better acquainted; neither had he so much cause to praise God for her as she afterwards for him; for if her own prayers obtained her first child, his blessings enriched her with five more. If she had not given her first son to God, ere she had him, I doubt whether she had not been ever barren; or, if she had kept her Samuel at home, whether ever she had conceived again. Now that piety which stripped her of her only child for the service of her God, hath multiplied the fruit of her womb, and gave her five for that one, which was still no less hers, because he was God's. There is no so certain way of increase as to lend or give unto the owner of all things.

CONTEMPLATION VII.—ELI AND HIS SONS.

If the conveyance of grace were natural, holy parents would not be so ill suited with children. What good man would not rather wish his loins dry, than fruitful of wickedness? Now we can neither traduce goodness, nor choose but traduce sin. If virtue was as well entailed upon as sin, one might serve to check the other in our children; but now since grace is derived from heaven on whomsoever it pleases the Giver, and that evil, which ours receive hereditarily from us, is multiplied by their own corruption, it can be no wonder that good men have ill children; it is rather a wonder that any children are not evil. The sons of Eli are as lewd, as himself was holy. If the goodness of examples, precepts, education, profession, could have been preservatives from extremity of sin, these sons of a holy father had not been wicked; now, neither parentage, nor breeding, nor priesthood, can keep the sons of Eli from the sons of Belial. If our children be good, let us thank God for it: this was more than we could give them; if evil, they may thank us, and themselves, us for their birth-sin, themselves for the improvement of it to that height of wickedness.

If they had not been sons of Eli, yet being priests of God, who would not have hoped their very calling should have infused some holiness into them? But now, even their white ephod covers foul sins; yea, rather, if they which serve at the altar degenerate, their wickedness is so much more above others, as their place is holier. A wicked priest is the worst creature upon earth. Who are devils but they which were once angels of light? Who can stumble at the sins of the evangelical Levites, that sees such impurity even before the ark of God? That God which promised to be the Levites' portion, had set forth the portion of his ministers; he will feast them at his own altar; the breast, and the right shoulder of the peace-offering was their morsel. These bold and covetous priests will rather have the flesh-hook their arbiter, than God. Whatsoever those three teeth fasten upon, shall be for their tooth; they were weary of one joint, and now their delicacy affects variety; God is not worthy to carve for these men, but their own hands; and this they do not receive, but take; and take violently, unseasonably. It had been fit God should be first served: their presumption will not stay his leisure; ere the fat be burned, ere the flesh be boiled, they snatch more than their share from the altar; as if the God of heaven should wait on their palate; as if the Israelites had come thither to sacrifice to their bellies. And, as commonly a wanton tooth is the harbinger of luxurious wantonness, they are no sooner fed than they neigh after the dames of Israel. Holy women assemble to the door of the tabernacle; these varlets tempt them to lust, that came thither for devotion: they had wives of their own, yet their unbridled desires rove after strangers, and fear not to pollute even that holy place with abominable filthiness. O sins too shameful for men, much more for the spiritual guides of Israel! He, that makes himself a servant to his tooth, shall easily become a slave to all inordinate affections. That altar, which expiated other men's sins, added to the sins of the sacrificers. Doubtless many a soul was the cleaner for the blood of the sacrifices which they shed, while their own were more impure; and as the altar cannot sanctify the priest, so the uncleanliness of the minister cannot pollute the offering; because the virtue thereof is not in the agent, but in the institution; in the representation his sin is his own, the comfort of the sacrament is from God. Our clergy is no charter for heaven. Even those, whose trade is devotion, may at once show the way to heaven by their tongue, and by their foot lead the way to hell. It is neither a cowl, nor an ephod, that can privilege the soul.

The sin of these men was worthy of contempt, yea, perhaps their persons; but for the people therefore to abhor the offerings of the Lord, was to add their evil unto the priests, and to offend God, because he was offended. There can no offence be justly taken, even at men, much less at God for the sake of men. No man's sins should bring the service of God into dislike; this is to make holy things guilty of our profaneness. It is a dangerous ignorance, not to distinguish bewixt the work, and the instrument; whereupon it oft comes to pass, that we fall out with God, because we find cause of offence from men, and gave God just cause to abhor us, because we abhor his service unjustly. Although it be true, of great men especially, that they are the last to know the evils of their own house, yet either it could not be, when all Israel rung of the lewdness of Eli's sons, that he only should not know it, or, if he knew it not, his ignorance cannot be excused; for a seasonable restraint might have prevented this extremity of debauchedness. Complaints are long muttered of the great, ere they dare break forth into open contestation. Public accusations of authority argue intolerable extremities of evil. Nothing but age can plead for Eli, that he was not the first accuser of his sons. Now, when their enormities came to be the voice of the multitude, he must hear it by force; and doubtless he heard it with grief enough, but not with anger enough; he that was the judge of Israel, should have unpartially judged his own flesh and blood; never could he have offered a more pleasing sacrifice, than the depraved blood of so wicked sons. In vain do we rebuke those sins abroad, which we tolerate at home. That man makes himself but ridiculous, that, leaving his own house on fire, runs to quench his neighbour's.

I heard Eli sharp enough to Hannah, upon but a suspicion of sin, and now how mild I find him to the notorious crimes of his own! "Why do you so, my sons? it is no good report; my sons, do no more so." The case is altered with the persons. If nature may be allowed to speak in judgment, and to make difference, not of sins, but of offenders, the sentence must needs savour of partiality. Had these men but some little slackened their duty, or heedlessly omitted some right of the sacrifice, this censure had not been unfit; but to punish the thefts, rapines, sacrileges, adulteries, incests of his sons, with "why do ye so?" was no other than to shave that head, which had deserved cutting off. As it is with ill humours, that a weak dose doth but stir and anger them, not purge them out; so it fareth with sins; an easy reproof doth but encourage wickedness, and makes it think itself so slight as that censure importeth. A vehement rebuke to a capital evil is but like a strong shower to a ripe field, which lays that corn which were worthy of a sickle. It is a breach of justice, not to proportionate the punishment to the offence: to whip a man for a murder, or to punish the purse for incest, or to burn treason in the hand, or to award the stocks to burglary, it is to patronize evil instead of avenging it. Of the two extremes, rigour is more safe for the public-weal, because the over-punishing of one offender frights many from sinning. It is better to live in a commonwealth where nothing is lawful, than where every thing.

Indulgent parents are cruel to themselves and their posterity. Eli could not have devised which way to have plagued himself and house so much, as by his kindness to his children's sins. What variety of judgments doth he now hear of from the messenger of God! First, because his old age (which uses to be subject to choler) inclined now to misfavour his sons, therefore there shall not be an old man left of his house for ever; and because it vexed him not enough to see his sons enemies to God in their profession, therefore he shall see his enemy in the habitation of the Lord; and because himself forbore to take vengeance of his sons, and esteemed their life above the glory of his Master, therefore God will revenge himself, by killing them both in one day; and because he abused his sovereignty by conniving at sin, therefore shall his house be stripped of this honour, and see it translated to another; and, lastly, because he suffered his sons to please their own wanton appetite, in taking meat off from God's trencher, therefore those which remain of his house shall come to his successors to beg a piece of silver, and a morsel of bread. In a word, because he was partial to his sons, God shall execute all this severely upon him and them. I do not read of any fault Eli had, but indulgence; and which of the notorious offenders were plagued more! Parents need no other means to make them miserable, than sparing the rod.

Who should be the bearer of these fearful tidings to Eli, but young Samuel, whom himself had trained up! He was now grown past his mother's coats, fit for the message of God. Old Eli rebuked not his young sons, therefore young Samuel is sent to rebuke him. I marvel not, while the priesthood was so corrupted, if the word of God were precious, if there were public vision. It is not the manner of God to grace the unworthy. The ordinary ministration in the temple was too much honour for those that robbed the altar, though they had no extraordinary revelations. Hereupon it was, that God lets old Eli sleep (who slept in his sin) and awakes Samuel, to tell him what he would do with his master. He which was wont to be the mouth of God to the people, must now receive the message of God from the mouth of another: as great persons will not speak to those with whom they are highly offended, but send them their checks by others.

The lights of the temple were now dim, and almost ready to give place to the morning, when God called Samuel; to signify perhaps, that those which should have been the lights of Israel, burned no less dimly, and were near their going out, and should be succeeded with one so much more lightsome than they, as the sun was more bright than the lamps. God had good leisure to have delivered this message by day, but he meant to make use of Samuel's mistaking; and therefore so speaks, that Eli may be asked for an answer, and perceive himself both omitted and censured. He that meant to use Samuel's voice to Eli, imitates the voice of Eli, to Samuel: Samuel had so accustomed himself to obedience, and to answer the call of Eli, that lying in the further cells of the Levites, he is easily raised from his sleep; and even in the night runs for his message to him, who was rather to receive it from him. Thrice is the old man disquieted with the diligence of his servant; and, though visions were rare in his days, yet is he not so unacquainted with God, as not to attribute that voice to him which himself heard not. Wherefore, like a better tutor than a parent, he teaches Samuel what he shall answer, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

It might have pleased God, at the first call, to have delivered his message to Samuel, not expecting the answer of a novice unseen in the visions of God; yet doth he rather defer it till the fourth summons, and will not speak till Samuel confessed his audience. God loves ever to prepare his servants for his employments, and will not commit his errands but to those whom he addresseth, beth by wonder and attention, and humility.

Eli knew well the gracious fashion of God, that, where he tended a favour, prorogation could be no hinderance; and therefore, after the call of God thrice answered with silence, he instructs Samuel to be ready for the fourth. If Samuel's silence had been wilful, I doubt whether he had been again solicited; now God doth both pity his error, and requite his diligence, by redoubling his name at the last.

Samuel had now many years ministered before the Lord, but never till now heard his voice; and now hears it with much terror, for the first word that he hears God speak is threatening, and that of vengeance to his master. What were these menaces, but so many premonitions to himself that should succeed Eli? God begins early to season their hearts with fear, whom he means to make eminent instruments of his glory. It is his mercy to make us witnesses of the judgments of others, that we may be forewarned, ere we have the occasions of sinning.

I do not hear God bid Samuel deliver his message to Eli. He, that was but now made a prophet, knows, that the errands of God intend not silence; and that God would not have spoken to him of another, if he had meant the news should be reserved to himself: neither yet did he run with open mouth unto Eli, to tell him this vision unasked. No wise man will be hasty to bring ill tidings to the great; rather doth he stay till the importunity of his master should wring it from his unwillingness; and then, as his concealment showed his love, so his full relation shall approve his fidelity. If the heart of Eli had not told him this news, before God told it Samuel, he had never been so instant with Samuel not to conceal it: his conscience did well presage that it concerned himself. Guiltiness needs no prophet to assure it of punishment. The mind that is troubled projecteth terrible things; and though it cannot single out the judgment allotted to it, yet it is in a confused expectation of some grievous evil. Surely Eli could not think it worse than it was; the sentence was fearful, and such as, I wonder, the neck, or the heart of old Eli could hold out the report of: That God swears he will judge Eli's house, and that with beggary, with death, with desolation, and that the wickedness of his house shall not be purged with sacrifice or offerings for ever: and yet this, which every Israelite's ear should tingle to hear of, when it should be done, old Eli hears with an unmoved patience and humble submission: "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." O admirable faith, and more than human constancy and resolution, worthy of the aged president of Shiloh, worthy of a heart sacrificed to that God, whose justice had refused to expiate his sin by sacrifice! If Eli have been an ill father to his sons, yet he is a good son to God, and is ready to kiss the very rod he shall smart withal; "It is the Lord," whom I have ever found holy and just and gracious, and he cannot but be himself: "Let him do what seemeth him good;" for whatsoever seemeth good to him, cannot but be good, howsoever it seems to me. Every man can open his hand to God while he blesses; but to expose ourselves willingly to the afflicting hand of our Maker, and to kneel to him, while he scourges us, is peculiar only to the faithful.

If ever a good heart could have freed a man from temporal punishments, Eli must needs have escaped. God's anger was appeased by his humble repentance, but his justice must be satisfied. Eli's sin, and his sons', was in the eye and mouth of all Israel; his therefore should have been much wronged by their impunity. Who would not have made these spiritual guides an example of lawlessness, and have said, What care I how I live, if Eli's sons go away unpunished? As not the tears of Eli, so not the words of Samuel, may fall to the ground. We may not measure the displeasure of God by his stripes. Many times, after the remission of the sin, the very chastisements of the Almighty are deadly. No repentance can assure us, that we shall not smart with outward afflictions; that can prevent the eternal displeasure of God, but still it may be necessary and good we should be corrected: our care and suit must be, that the evils, which shall not be averted, may be sanctified.

If the prediction of these evils were fearful, what shall the execution be? The presumption of the ill-taught Israelites shall give occasion to this judgment; for, being smitten before the Philistines, they send for the ark into the field. Who gave them authority to command the ark of God at their pleasure? Here was no consulting with the ark, which they would fetch; no inquiry of Samuel, whether they should fetch it; but a heady resolution of presumptuous elders to force God into the field, and to challenge success. If God were not with the ark, why did they send for it, and rejoice in the coming of it? If God were with it, why was not his allowance asked that it should come? How can the people be good, where the priests are wicked? When the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, that dwells between the cherubims, was brought into the host, though with mean and wicked attendance, Israel doth, as it were, fill the heaven, and shake the earth with shouts; as if the ark and victory were no less inseparable, than they and their sins. Even the lewdest men will be looking for favour from that God, whom they cared not to displease, contrary to the conscience of their deservings. Presumption doth the same in wicked men, which faith doth in the holiest. Those, that regarded not the God of the ark, think themselves safe and happy in the ark of God. Vain men are transported with a confidence in the outside of religion, not regarding the substance and soul of it, which only can give them true peace. But, rather than God will humour superstition in Israelites, he will suffer his own ark to fall into the hands of Philistines. Rather will he seem to slacken his hand of protection, than he will be thought to have his hands bound by a formal misconfidence. The slaughter of the Israelites was no plague to this; it was a greater plague rather to them that should survive and behold it. The two sons of Eli, which had helped to corrupt their brethren, die by the hands of the uncircumcised, and are now too late separated from the ark of God by Philistines, which should have been before separated by their father. They had lived formerly to bring God's altar into contempt, and now live to carry his ark into captivity: and, at last, as those that had made up the measure of their wickedness, are slain in their sin.

Ill news doth ever either run or fly. The man of Benjamin, which ran from the host, hath soon filled the city with outcries, and Eli's ears with the cry of the city. The good old man, after ninety and eight years, sits in the gate, as one that never thought himself too aged to do God service, and hears the news of Israel's discomfiture, and his son's death, though with sorrow, yet with patience: but when the messenger tells him of the ark of God taken, he can live no longer; that word strikes him down backward from his throne, and kills him in the fall. No sword of a Philistine could have slain him more painfully: neither know I whether his neck or his heart were first broken. O fearful judgment, that ever any Israelite's ear could tingle withal! The ark lost! What good man would wish to live without God? Who can choose but think he hath lived too long, that hath overlived the testimonies of God's presence with his church? Yea, the very daughter-in-law of Eli, a woman, the wife of a lewd husband, when she was at once travailing, (upon that tidings,) and in that travail dying, to make up the full sum of God's judgment upon that wicked house, as one insensible of the death of her father, of her husband, of herself, in comparison of this loss, calls her (then unseasonable) son Ichabod, and with her last breath says, "The glory is departed from Israel, the ark is taken." What cares she for a posterity which should want the ark? What cares she for a son come into the world of Israel, when God was gone from it? And how willingly doth she depart from them, from whom God was departed! Not outward magnificence, not state, not wealth, not favour of the mighty, but the presence of God in his ordinances, are the glory of Israel; the subduing whereof is a greater judgment than destruction.

O Israel, worse now than no people! a thousand times more miserable than Philistines! Those Pagans went away triumphing with the ark of God and victory, and leave the remnants of the chosen people to lament that they once had a God.

O cruel and wicked indulgence, that is now found guilty of the death, not only of the priests and people, but of religion! Unjust mercy can never end in less than blood: and it were well, if only the body should have cause to complain of that kind cruelty.

BOOK XII.

CONTEMPLATION I.—ARK AND DAGON.

If men did not mistake God, they could not arise to such height of impiety; the acts of his just judgment are imputed to impotence. That God would send his ark captive to the Philistines, is so construed by them, as if he could not keep it. The wife of Phinehas cried out, that glory was departed from Israel; the Philistines dare say in triumph that glory is departed from the God of Israel. The ark was not Israel's but God's; this victory reaches higher than to men. Dagon had never so great a day, so many sacrifices, as now that he seems to take the God of Israel prisoner. Where should the captive be bestowed, but in custody of the victor? It is not love, but insultation, that lodges the ark close beside Dagon. What a spectacle was this, to see uncircumcised Philistines laying their profane hands upon the testimony of God's presence! to see the glorious mercy-seat under the roof of an idol: to see the two cherubims spreading their wings under a false god!

O the deep and holy wisdom of the Almighty, which overreaches all the finite conceits of his creatures, who, while he seems most to neglect himself, fetches about most glory to his own name! He winks, and sits still on purpose to see what men would do, and is content to suffer indignity from his creature for a time, that he may be everlastingly magnified in his justice and power. That honour pleaseth God and men best, which is raised out of contempt.

The ark of God was not used to such porters: the Philistines carry it unto Ashdod that the victory of Dagon may be more glorious. What pains superstition puts men unto, for the triumph of a false cause! And if profane Philistines can think it no toil to carry the ark where they should not, what a shame is it for us, if we do not gladly attend it where we should! How justly may God's truth scorn the imparity of our zeal!

If the Israelites did put confidence in the ark, can we marvel, that the Philistines did put confidence in that power, which, as they thought, had conquered the ark? The less is ever subject unto the greater; what could they now think, but that heaven and earth were theirs? Who shall stand out against them, when the God of Israel hath yielded? Security and presumption attend ever at the threshold of ruin.

God will let them sleep in this confidence; in the morning they shall find how vainly they have dreamed. Now they begin to find they have but gloried in their own plague, and overthrown nothing but their own peace. Dagon hath a house, when God hath but a tabernacle. It is no measuring of religion by outward glory. Into this house the proud Philistines come, the next morning, to congratulate unto their god, so great a captive, such divine spoils, and, in their early devotions, to fall down before him, under whom the God of Israel was fallen; and lo! where they find their god fallen down on the ground upon his face, before him whom they thought both his prisoner and theirs. Their god is forced to do that, which they should have done voluntarily; although God casts down that dumb rival of his for scorn, not for adoration. O ye foolish Philistines, could ye think that the same house would hold God and Dagon? Could ye think a senseless stone a fit companion and guardian for the living God? Had ye laid your Dagon upon his face, prostrate before the ark, yet would not God have endured the indignity of such a lodging; but now that ye presume to set up your carved stone equal to his cherubims, go read your folly in the floor of your temple; and know, that He, which cast your God so low, can cast you lower.

The true God owes a shame to those which will be making matches between himself and Belial.

But this perhaps was only a mischance, or a neglect of attendance. Lay to your hands, O ye Philistines, and raise up Dagon into his place. It is a miserable god that needs helping up: had ye not been more senseless than that stone, how could you choose but think, How shall he raise us above our enemies, that cannot rise alone? How shall he establish us in the station of our peace, that cannot hold his own foot? If Dagon did give the foil unto the God of Israel, what power is it that hath cast him upon his face, in his own temple? It is just with God, that those which want grace, shall want wit too. It is the power of superstition to turn men into those stocks and stones which they worship: they that make them are like unto them. Doubtless this first fall of Dagon was kept as secret, and excused as well as it might, and served rather for astonishment than conviction; there was more strangeness than horror in that accident. That whereas Dagon had wont to stand, and the Philistines fall down,—now Dagon fell down and the Philistines stood, and must become the patrons of their own god; their god worships them upon his face, and craves more help from them than ever he could give. But, if their sottishness can digest this, all is well.

Dagon is set in his place, and now those hands are lift up to him which helped to lift him up; and those faces are prostrate unto him, before whom he lay prostrate. Idolatry and superstition are not easily put out of countenance; but will the jealousy of the true God put it up thus? shall Dagon escape with a harmless fall? Surely, if they had let him lie still upon the pavement, perhaps that insensible statue had found no other revenge; but now they will be advancing it to the rood-loft again, and affront God's ark with it; the event will shame them, and let them know, how much God scorns a partner, either of his own making or theirs.

The morning is fittest for devotion; then do the Philistines flock to the temple of their God. What a shame is it for us to come late to ours! Although not so much piety as curiosity did now hasten their speed, to see what rest their Dagon was allowed to get in his own roof: and now, behold, their kind god is come to meet them in the way; some pieces of him salute their eyes upon the threshold. Dagon's head and hands are overrun their fellows, to tell the Philistines how much they were mistaken in a god.

This second fall breaks the idol in pieces, and threats the same confusion to the worshippers of it. Easy warnings neglected end ever in destruction. The head is for devising, the hand for execution; in these two powers of their god did the Philistines chiefly trust; these are therefore laid under their feet upon the threshold, that they might afar off see their vanity, and that, if they would, they might set their foot on that best piece of their god, whereon their heart was set.

There was nothing wherein that idol resembled a man, but in his head and hands, the rest was but a scaly portraiture of a fish; God would therefore separate from this stone that part which had mocked man with the counterfeit of himself; that man might see what an unworthy lump he had matched with himself, and set up above himself. The just quarrel of God is bent upon those means, and that parcel, which have dared to rob him of his glory.

How can the Philistines now miss the sight of their own folly? How can they be but enough convicted of their mad idolatry, to see their god lie broken to morsels under their feet; every piece whereof proclaims the power of Him that brake it, and the stupidity of those that adored it! Who would expect any other issue of this act, but to hear the Philistines say, We now see how superstition hath blinded us! Dagon is no god for us; our hearts shall never more rest upon a broken statue; that only true God which hath broken ours, shall challenge us by the right of conquest. But here was none of this; rather a further degree of their dotage follows upon this palpable conviction; they cannot yet suspect that god, whose head they may trample upon; but, instead of hating their Dagon, that lay broken upon their threshold, they honour the threshold on which Dagon lay, and dare not set their foot on that place, which was hallowed by the broken head and hands of their deity. O the obstinacy of idolatry, which, where it hath got hold of the heart, knows neither to blush nor yield, but rather gathers strength from that which might justly confound it! The hand of the Almighty, which moved them not, in falling upon their God, falls now nearer them upon their persons, and strikes them in their bodies, which would not feel themselves stricken in their idol. Pain shall humble them whom shame cannot. Those, which had entertained the secret thoughts of abominable idolatry within them, are now plagued in the inwardest and most secret part of their bodies, with a loathsome disease; and now grow weary of themselves, instead of their idolatry. I do not hear them acknowledge it was God's hand which had stricken Dagon their god, till now they find themselves stricken. God's judgments are the rack of godless men; if one strain make them not confess, let them be stretched but one wrench higher, and they cannot be silent. The just avenger of sin will not lose the glory of his executions, but will have men know from whom they smart.

The emerods were not a disease beyond the compass of natural causes; neither was it hard for the wiser sort to give a reason of their complaint; yet they ascribe it to the hand of God. The knowledge and operation of secondary causes should be no prejudice to the first. They are worse than the Philistines, who, when they see the means, do not acknowlege the first mover, whose active just power is no less seen in employing ordinary agents, than in raising up extraordinary; neither doth he less smite by a common fever, than by a revenging angel.

They judge right of the cause; what do they resolve for the cure? "Let not the ark of the God of Israel abide with us;" where they should have said, Let us cast out Dagon, that we may pacify and retain the God of Israel; they determine to thrust out the ark of God, that they might peaceably enjoy themselves, and Dagon. Wicked men are upon all occasions glad to be rid of God, but they can, with no patience, endure to part with their sins; and, while they are weary of the hand that punisheth them, they hold fast the cause of their punishment.

Their first and only care is to put away him, who as he hath corrected, so can ease them. Folly is never separated from wickedness.

Their heart told them that they had no right to the ark. A council is called of their princes and priests. If they had resolved to send it home, they had done wisely. Now they do not carry it away, but they carry it about from Ebenezer to Ashdod, from Ashdod to Gath, from Gath to Ekron. Their stomach was greater than their conscience. The ark was too sore for them; yet it was too good for Israel; and they will rather die than make Israel happy. Their conceit, that the change of the air could appease the ark, God useth to his own advantage; for by this means, his power is known, and his judgment spread over all the country of the Philistines. What do these men now, but send the plague of God to their fellows! The justice of God can make the sins of men their mutual executioners. It is the fashion of wicked men to draw their neighbours into the partnership of their condemnation.

Wheresoever the ark goes, there is destruction. The best of God's ordinances, if they be not proper to us, are deadly. The Israelites did not more shout for joy, when they saw the ark come to them, than the Ekronites cry out for grief to see it brought amongst them. Spiritual things are either sovereign or hurtful, according to the disposition of the receivers. The ark doth either save or kill, as it is entertained.

At last, when the Philistines are well weary of pain and death, they are glad to be quit of their sin. The voice of the princes and people is changed to the better; "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to his own place." God knows how to bring the stubbornest enemy upon his knees, and makes him do that out of fear, which his best child would do out of love and duty. How miserable was the estate of these Philistines! Every man was either dead or sick. Those that were left living, through their extremity of pain, envied the dead, and the cry of their whole cities went up to heaven. It is happy that God hath such store of plagues and thunderbolts for the wicked: if he had not a fire of judgment, wherewith the iron hearts of men might be made flexible, he would want obedience and the world peace.

CONTEMPLATION II.—THE ARK'S REVENGE AND RETURN.

It had wont to be a sure rule, wheresoever God is among men, there is the church: here only it failed. The testimony of God's presence was many months amongst the Philistines, for a punishment to his own people whom he left; for a curse to those foreigners which entertained it. Israel was seven months without God. How do we think faithful Samuel took this absence! How desolate and forlorn did the tabernacle of God look without the ark! There were still the altars of God; his priests, Levites, tables, vails, censers, and all their legal accoutrements: these, without the ark, were as the sun without light in the midst of an eclipse. If all these had been taken away, and only the ark had been remaining, the loss had been nothing to this, that the ark should be gone, and they left: for what are all these without God, and how all-sufficient is God without these! There are times wherein God withdraws himself from his church, and seems to leave her without comfort, without protection. Sometimes we shall find Israel taken from the ark, other whiles the ark is taken from Israel: in either, there is a separation betwixt the ark and Israel. Heavy times to every true Israelite; yet such, as whose example may relieve us in our desertions. Still was this people Israel, the seed of him that would not be left of God without a blessing; and therefore, without the testimony of his presence, was God present with them. It were wide with the faithful, if God were not oftentimes with them, when there is no witness of his presence.

One act was a mutual penance to the Israelites and Philistines, I know not to whether more. Israel grieved for the loss of that, whose presence grieved the Philistines; their pain was therefore no other than voluntary. It is strange, that the Philistines would endure seven months' smart with the ark, since they saw that the presence of that prisoner would not requite, no, nor mitigate to them one hour's misery. Foolish men will be struggling with God, till they be utterly either breathless or impotent. Their hope was, that time might abate displeasure, even while they persisted to offend. The false hopes of worldly men cost them dear; they could not be so miserable, if their own hearts did not deceive them with misexpectations of impossible favour.

In matters that concern a God, who is so fit to be consulted with as the priests? The princes of the Philistines had before given their voices; yet nothing is determined, nothing is done without the direction and assent of those whom they accounted sacred. Nature itself sends us, in divine things, to those persons whose calling is divine. It is either distrust or presumption, or contempt, that carries us our own ways in spiritual matters, without advising with them whose lips God hath appointed to preserve knowledge. There cannot but arise many difficulties in us about the ark of God: whom should we consult with, but those which have the tongue of the learned?

Doubtless, this question of the ark did abide much debating. There wanted not fair probabilities on both sides. A wise Philistine might well plead, if God had either so great care of the ark, or power to retain it, how is it become ours? A wiser than he would reply, If the God of Israel had wanted either care or power, Dagon and we had been still whole: why do we thus groan and die, all that are but within the air of the ark, if a divine hand do not attend it? Their smart pleads enough for the dismission of the ark. The next demand of their priests and soothsayers is, how it should be sent home. Affliction had made them so wise as to know, that every fashion of parting with the ark would not satisfy the owner. Oftentimes the circumstance of an action mars the substance. In divine matters we must not only look that the body of our service be sound, but the clothes be fit. Nothing hinders, but that sometimes good advice may fall from the mouth of wicked men. These superstitious priests can counsel them, not to send away the ark of God empty, but to give it a sin-offering. They had not lived so far from the smoke of the Jewish altars, but that they knew God was accustomed to manifold oblations, and chiefly those of expiation. No Israelite could have said better: superstition is the ape of true devotion; and if we look not to the ground of both, many times it is hard, by the very outward acts, to distinguish them. Nature itself teacheth us, that God loves a full hand: he that hath been so bountiful to us as to give us all, looks for a return of some offering from us. If we present him with nothing but our sins, how can we look to be accepted? The sacrifices under the gospel are spiritual; with these must we come into the presence of God, if we desire to carry away remission and favour.

The Philistines knew well, that it were bootless for them to offer what they listed; their next suit is to be directed in the matter of their oblation. Pagans can teach us how unsafe it is to walk in the ways of religion without a guide; yet here their best teachers can but guess at their duty, and must devise for the people that which the people durst not impose upon themselves. The golden emerods and mice were but conjectural prescripts. With what security may we consult with them, which have their directions from the mouth and hand of the Almighty.

God struck the Philistines at once in their god, in their bodies, in their land: in their god, by his ruin and dismembering; in their bodies, by the emerods; in their land, by the mice. That base vermin did God send among them, on purpose to shame their Dagon and them, that they might see how unable their god was, which they thought the victor of the ark, to subdue the least mouse, which the true God did create, and command to plague them. This plague upon their fields began together with that upon their bodies; it was mentioned, not complained of, till they think of dismissing the ark. Greater crosses do commonly swallow up the less; at least lesser evils are either silent or unheard, while the ear is filled with the clamour of greater. Their very princes were punished with the mice, as well as with the emerods. God knows no persons in the execution of judgments; the least and meanest of all God's creatures, is sufficient to be the revenger of his Creator.

God sent them mice, and emerods of flesh and blood; they return him both these of gold, to imply both that these judgments came out from God, and that they did gladly give him the glory of that whereof he gave them pain and sorrow, and that they would willingly buy off their pain with the best of their substance. The proportion betwixt the complaint and satisfaction is more precious to him than the metal. There was a public confession in this resemblance, which is so pleasing unto God, that he rewards it, even in wicked men, with a relaxation of outward punishment. The number was no less significant than the form: five golden emerods and mice, for the five princes and divisions of Philistines. As God made no difference in punishing, so they make none in their oblation. The people are comprised in them, in whom they are united, their several princes: they were one with their prince, their offspring is one with his; as they were ring-leaders in the sin, so they must be in the satisfaction. In a multitude it is ever seen, as in a beast, that the body follows the head. Of all others, great men had need look to their ways; it is in them, as in figures, one stands for a thousand. One offering serves not all, there must be five, according to the five heads of the offence. Generalities will not content God; every man must make his several peace, if not in himself, yet in his head. Nature taught them a shadow of that, the substance and perfection whereof is taught us by the grace of the gospel. Every soul must satisfy God, if not in itself, yet in Him in whom we are both one, and absolute. We are the body, whereof Christ is the head; our sin is in ourselves, our satisfaction must be in him.

Samuel himself could not have spoken more divinely than these priests of Dagon; they do not only talk of giving glory to the God of Israel, but fall into a holy and grave expostulation; wherefore then should ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts, when he wrought wonderfully amongst them, &c. They confess a supereminent and revenging hand of God over their gods, they parallel their plagues with the Egyptian, they make use of Pharaoh's sin and judgment; what could be better said? All religions have afforded them that could speak well. These good words left them still both Philistines and superstitious. How should men be hypocrites, if they had not good tongues? Yet, as wickedness can hardly hide itself, these holy speeches are not without a tincture of that idolatry, wherewith the heart was infected; for they profess care not only of the persons and lands of the Philistines, but of their gods; "That he may take his hand from you, and from your gods." Who would think that wisdom and folly could lodge so near together, that the same men should have care both of the glory of the true God, and preservation of the false! That they should be so vain as to take thought for those gods which they granted to be obnoxious unto a higher Deity! Ofttimes even one word bewrayeth a whole pack of falsehood; and though superstition be a cleanly counterfeit, yet some one slip of the tongue discovers it; as we say of devils, which, though they put on fair forms, yet are they known by their cloven feet.

What other warrant these superstitious priests had for the main substance of their advice, I know not; sure I am, the probability of the event was fair, that two kine, never used to any yoke, should run from their calves, which were newly shut up from them, to draw the ark home into a contrary way, must needs argue a hand about nature. What else should overrule brute creatures to prefer a forced carriage unto a natural burden? What should carry them from their own home, towards the home of the ark? What else should guide an untamed and untaught team, in as right a path towards Israel, as their teachers could have gone? What else could make very beasts more wise than their masters? There is a special providence of God in the very motions of brute creatures; neither Philistines nor Israelites saw ought that drove them, yet they saw them so run as those that were led by a divine conduct. The reasonless creatures also do the will of their Maker; every act that is done either by them, or to them, makes up the decree of the Almighty: and if in extraordinary actions and events his hand is more visible, yet it is no less certainly present in the common.

Little did the Israelites of Beth-shemesh look for such a sight, while they were reaping their wheat in the valley, as to see the ark of God come running to them without a convoy: neither can it be said, whether they were more affected with joy, or with astonishment; with joy at the presence of the ark, with astonishment at the miracle of the transportation. Down went their sickles, and now every man runs to reap the comfort of this better harvest, to meet that bread of angels, to salute those cherubims, to welcome that God, whose absence had been their death. But as it is hard not to overjoy in a sudden prosperity, and to use happiness is no less difficult than to forbear it, these glad Israelites cannot see, but they must gaze; they cannot gaze on the glorious outside, but they must be, whether out of rude jollity, or curiosity, or suspicion of the purloining some of those sacred implements, prying into the secrets of God's ark. Nature is too subject to extremities, and is ever either too dull in want, or wanton in fruition: it is no easy matter to keep a mean, whether in good or evil.

Beth-shemesh was a city of priests, they should have known better how to demean themselves towards the ark; this privilege doubled their offence. There was no malice in this curious inquisition; the same eyes that looked into the ark, looked also up to heaven in their offerings; and the same hands that touched it, offered sacrifice to the God that brought it. Who could expect any thing now but acceptation? Who would suspect any danger? It is not a following act of devotion that can make amends for a former sin. There was a death owing them immediately upon their offence: God will take his own time for the execution. In the meanwhile they may sacrifice, but they cannot satisfy; they cannot escape. The kine are sacrificed, the cart burns them that drew it. Here was an offering of praise, when they had more need of a trespass-offering. Many a heart is lifted up in a conceit of joy, when it hath just cause of humiliation. God lets them alone with their sacrifice; but, when that is done, he comes over them with a back-reckoning for their sin. Fifty thousand and seventy Israelites are struck dead, for this unreverence to the ark. A woeful welcome for the ark of God into the borders of Israel! It killed them for looking into it, who thought it their life to see it. It dealt blows and death on both hands, to Philistines, to Israelites; to both of them for profaning it, the one with their idol, the other with their eyes. It is a fearful thing to use the holy ordinances of God with an unreverent boldness. Fear and trembling become us, in our access to the majesty of the Almighty. Neither was there more state than secrecy in God's ark. Some things the wisdom of God desires to conceal. The unreverence of the Israelites was no more faulty than their curiosity. "Secret things belong to God; things revealed, to us, and to our children."

CONTEMPLATION II.—THE REMOVE OF THE ARK.

I HEAR of the Beth-shemites' lamentation, I hear not of their repentance: they complain of their smart, they complain not of their sin: and, for ought I can perceive, speak as if God were curious, rather than they faulty. "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God, and to whom shall he go from us!" As if none could please that God, which misliked them. It is the fashion of natural men, to justify themselves in their own courses: if they cannot charge any earthly thing with the blame of their suffering, they will cast it on heaven. That a man pleads himself guilty of his own wrong, is no common work of God's Spirit. Beth-shemesh bordered too near upon the Philistines. If these men thought the very presence of the ark hurtful, why do they send to their neighbours of Kirjath-jearim, that they might make themselves miserable? Where there is a misconceit of God, it is no marvel if there be a defect of charity. How cunningly do they send their message to their neighbours! They do not say, the ark of God is come to us of its own accord; lest the men of Kirjath-jearim should reply, It is come to you, let it stay with you. They say only, the Philistines have brought it. They tell of the presence of the ark, they do not tell of the success, lest the example of their judgment should have discouraged the forwardness of their relief. And, after all, the offer was plausible; "Come ye down, and take it up to you;" as if the honour had been too great for themselves; as if their modesty had been such, that they would not forestall and engross happiness from the rest of Israel.

It is no boot to teach nature how to tell her own tale; smart and danger will make a man witty. He is rarely constant, that will not dissemble for ease. It is good to be suspicious of the evasions of those which would put off misery. Those of Beth-shemesh were not more crafty than these of Kirjath-jearim (which was the ground of their boldness) faithful. So many thousand Beth-shemites could not be dead, and no part of the rumour fly to them. They heard how thick not only the Philistines, but the bordering Israelites, fell down dead before the ark; yet they durst adventure to come, and fetch it, even from amongst the carcasses of their brethren. They had been formerly acquainted with the ark, they knew it was holy, it could not be changeable; and therefore they well conceived this slaughter to arise from the unholiness of men, not from the rigour of God, and thereupon can seek comfort in that which others found deadly. God's children cannot, by any means, be discouraged from their honour and love to his ordinances. If they see thousands struck down to hell by the sceptre of God's kingdom, yet they will kiss it upon their knees, and if their Saviour be a rock of offence, and the occasion of the fall of millions in Israel, they can feed temperately of that whereof others have suffered to death, &c.

Beth-shemesh was a city of priests and Levites. Kirjath-jearim a city of Judah, where we hear but of one Levite, Abinadab; yet this city was more zealous for God, more reverent and conscionable in the entertainment of the ark, than the other. We heard of the taking down of the ark by the Beth-shemites, when it came miraculously to them; we do not hear of any man sanctified for the attendance of it, as was done in this second lodging of the ark. Grace is not tied either to number or means. It is in spiritual matters, as in an estate; small helps with good thrift enrich us, when great patrimonies lose themselves in the neglect. Shiloh was wont to be the place which was honoured with the presence of the ark. Ever since the wickedness of Eli's sons, that was forlorn and desolate, and now Kirjath-jearim succeeds into this privilege. It did not stand with the royal liberty of God, no, not under the law, to tie himself unto places and persons. Unworthiness was ever a sufficient cause of exchange. It was not yet his time to stir from the Jews, yet he removed from one province to another. Less reason have we to think, that so God will reside amongst us, that none of our provocations can drive him from us, &c.

Israel, which had found the misery of God's absence, is now resolved into tears of contrition and thankfulness upon his return. There is no mention of their lamenting after the Lord while he was gone, but when he was returned, and settled in Kirjath-jearim; the mercies of God draw more tears from his children, than his judgments do from his enemies. There is no better sign of good nature or grace, than to be won to repentance with kindness. Not to think of God, except we be beaten into it, is servile. Because God was come again to Israel, therefore Israel is returned to God: if God had not come first, they had never come. If he, that came to them, had not made them come to him, they had been ever parted. They were cloyed with God, while he was perpetually resident with them: now that his absence had made him dainty, they cleave to him fervently and penitently in his return. This was it that God meant in his departure, a better welcome at his coming back.

I heard no news of Samuel, all this while the ark was gone. Now, when the ark is returned and placed in Kirjath-jearim, I hear him treat with the people. It is not like he was silent in this sad desertion of God; but now he takes full advantage of the professed contrition of Israel, to deal with them effectually, for their perfect conversion unto God. It is great wisdom, in spiritual matters, to take occasion by the forelock, and to strike while the iron is hot. We may beat long enough at the door, but till God have opened, it is no going in; and, when he hath opened, it is no delaying to enter. The trial of sincerity is the abandoning of our wonted sins. This Samuel urgeth; "If ye be come again unto the Lord with all your heart, put away the strange gods from among you, and Ashtaroth." In vain had it been to profess repentance, whilst they continued in idolatry. God will never acknowledge any convert, that stays in a known sin. Graces and virtues are so linked together, that he which hath one, hath all. The partial conversion of men unto God is but hateful hypocrisy. How happily effectual is a word spoken in season! Samuel's exhortation wrought upon the hearts of Israel, and fetched water out of their eyes, suits and confessions and vows out of their lips, and their false gods out of their hands; yet it was not merely remorse, but fear also, that moved Israel to this humble submission.

The Philistines stood over them still, and threatened them with new assaults; the memory of their late slaughter and spoil was yet fresh in their minds; sorrow for the evils past, and fear of the future, fetched them down upon their knees. It is not more necessary for men to be cheered with hopes, than to be awed with dangers. Where God intends the humiliation of his servants, there shall not want means of their dejection. It was happy for Israel that they had an enemy. Is it possible that the Philistines, after those deadly plagues which they sustained from the God of Israel, should think of invading Israel? Those that were so mated with the presence of the ark, that they never thought themselves safe till it was out of sight, do they now dare to thrust themselves upon the new revenge of the ark? It slew them while they thought to honour it, and do they think to escape whilst they resist it? It slew them in their own coasts, and do they come to it to seek death? Yet, behold, no sooner do the Philistines hear that the Israelites are gathered to Mizpeh, but the princes of the Philistines gather themselves against them. No warnings will serve obdurate hearts: wicked men are even ambitious of destruction. Judgments need not to go find them out; they run to meet their bane.

The Philistines come up, and the Israelites fear; they that had not the wit to fear, whilst they were not friends with God, have not now the grace of fearlessness, when they were reconciled to God. Boldness and fear are commonly misplaced in the best hearts; when we should tremble, we are confident; and when we should be assured, we tremble. Why should Israel have feared, since they had made their peace with the God of hosts? Nothing should affright those which are upright with God. The peace which Israel hath made with God was true, but tender. They durst not trust their own innocency, so much as the prayers of Samuel; "Cease not to cry to the Lord our God for us." In temporal things, nothing hinders but we may fare better for other men's faith than for our own. It is no small happiness to be interested in them which are favourites in the court of heaven. One faithful man, in these occasions, is more worth than millions of the wavering and uncertain.

A good heart is easily won to devotion. Samuel cries, and sacrificeth to God: he had done so, they had entreated his silence, yea, his forbearance. While he is offering, the Philistines fight with Israel, and God fights with the Philistines, though "the Lord thundered with a great thunder that day, upon the Philistines, and scattered them." Samuel fought more upon his knees, than all Israel besides. The voice of God answered the voice of Samuel, and speaks confusion and death to the Philistines. How were the proud Philistines dead with fear ere they died, to hear the fearful thunder-claps of an angry God against them! to see that heaven itself fought against them! He that slew them secretly, in the revenges of his ark, now kills them with open horror in the fields. If presumption did not make wicked men mad, they would never lift their hand against the Almighty: what are they in his hands, when he is disposed to vengeance!

CONTEMPLATION IV.—THE MEETING OF SAUL AND SAMUEL.

SAMUEL began his acquaintance with God early, and continued it long. He began it in his long coats; and continued to his grey hairs. He judged Israel all the days of his life. God doth not use to put off his old servants; their age endeareth them to him the more; if we be not unfaithful to him, he cannot be unconstant to us. At last his decayed age met with ill partners, his sons for deputies, and Saul for a king. The wickedness of his sons gave the occasion of a change. Perhaps Israel had never thought of a king, if Samuel's sons had not been unlike their father. Who can promise himself holy children, when the loins of a Samuel, and the education in the temple, yielded monsters! It is not likely that good Samuel was faulty in that indulgence, for which his own mouth had denounced God's judgment against Eli: yet this holy man succeeds Eli in his cross, as well as his place, though not in his sin, and is afflicted with a wicked succession. God will let us find, that grace is by gift, not by inheritance.

I fear Samuel was too partial to nature in the surrogation of his sons; I do not hear of God's allowance to this act; if this had been God's choice, as well as his, it had been like to have received more blessing. Now all Israel had cause to rue, that these were the sons of Samuel: for now the question was not of their virtues, but of their blood; not of their worthiness, but their birth. Even the best heart may be blinded with affection. Who can marvel at these errors of parents' love, when he, that so holily judged Israel all his life, misjudged of his own sons!

It was God's ancient purpose to raise up a king to his people. How doth he take occasion to perform it, but by the unruly desires of Israel: even as we say of human proceedings, that ill manners beget good laws. That monarchy is the best form of government, there is no question: good things may be ill desired; so was this of Israel. If an itching desire of alteration had not possessed them, why did they not rather sue for a reformation of their governors, than for a change of government? Were Samuel's sons so desperately evil, that there was no possibility of amendment? or, if they were past hope, were there not some others to have succeeded the justice of Samuel, no less than these did his person? What needed Samuel to be thrust out of place? What needed the ancient form of administration to be altered? He, that raised up their judges, would have found time to raise them up kings. Their curious and inconstant newfangleness will not abide to stay it, but with an heady importunity labours to over-hasten the pace of God. Where there is a settled course of good government, howsoever blemished with some weaknesses, it is not safe to be overforward to a change, though it should be to the better. He, by whom kings reign, says, they have cast him away that he should not reign over them, because they desire a king to reign over them. Judges were his own institution to his people, as yet kings were not; after that kings were settled, to desire the government of judges, had been a much more seditious inconstancy. God hath not appointed, to every time and place, such forms which are simply best in themselves, but those which are best to them unto whom they are appointed; which we may neither alter till he begin, nor recall when he hath altered.

This business seemed personally to concern Samuel, yet he so deals in it, not as a party, not as a judge in his own case, but as a prophet of God, as a friend of his opposite. He prays to God for advice, he foretells the state and courses of their future king. Wilful men are blind to all dangers, are deaf to all good counsels. Israel must have a king, though they pay never so dear for their longing. The vain affectation of conformity to other nations overcomes all discouragements. There is no readier way to error, than to make others' examples the rule of our desires or actions. If every man have not grounds of his own, whereon to stand, there can be no stability in his resolutions or proceedings.

Since then they choose to have a king, God himself will choose and appoint the king which they shall have. The kingdom shall begin in Benjamin, which was to endure in Judah. It was no probability or reason this first king should prove well, because he was abortive; their humour of innovation deserved to be punished with their own choice. Kish, the father of Saul, was mighty in estate; Saul was mighty in person, overlooking the rest of the people in stature, no less than he should do in dignity. The senses of the Israelites could not but be well pleased for the time, howsoever their hearts were afterwards. When men are carried with outward shows, it is a sign that God means them a delusion.

How far God fetches his purposes about! The asses of Kish, Saul's father, are strayed away; what is that to the news of a kingdom! God lays these small accidents for the ground of greater designs. The asses must be lost, none but Saul must go with his father's servant to seek them; Samuel shall meet them in the search; Saul shall be premonished of his ensuing royalty. Little can we, by the beginning of any action, guess at God's intention at the conclusion.

Obedience was a fit entrance into sovereignty. The service was homely for the son of a great man, yet he refuseth not to go, as a fellow to his father's servant, upon so mean a search. The disobedient and scornful are good for nothing, they are neither fit to be subjects nor governors. Kish was a great man in his country, yet he disdaineth not to send his son Saul upon a thrifty errand, neither doth Saul plead his disparagement for a refusal. Pride and wantonness have marred our times. Great parents count it a disreputation to employ their sons in courses of frugality; and their pampered children think it a shame to do any thing; and so bear themselves, as those that hold it the only glory to be either idle or wicked.

Neither doth Saul go fashionably to work, but does this service heartily and painfully, as a man that desires rather to effect the command, than please the commander. He passed from Ephraim to the land of Shalisha, from Shalisha to Salim, from Salim to Jemini, whence his house came from Jemini to Zuph; not so much as staying with any of his kindred so long as to victual himself. He, that was afterward an ill king, approved himself a good son. As there are adversity of relations and offices, so there is of dispositions; those which are excellent in some, attain not to a mediocrity in others. It is no arguing from private virtues to public; from dexterity in one station, to the rest. A several grace belongs to the particular carriage of every place whereto we are called, which, if we want, the place may well want us.

There was more praise of his obedience in ceasing to seek, than in seeking. He takes care, lest his father should take for him, that, whilst he should seem officious in the less, he might not neglect the greatest. A blind obedience, in some cases, doth well; but it doth far better, when it is led with the eyes of discretion; otherwise, we may more offend in pleasing, than in disobeying.

Great is the benefit of a wise and religious attendant; such a one puts us into those duties and actions which are most expedient, and least thought of. If Saul had not had a discreet servant, he had returned but as wise as he came; now he is drawn into consult with the man of God, and hears more than he hoped for. Saul was now a sufficient journey from his father's house; yet his religious servant, in this remoteness, takes knowledge of the place where the prophet dwells; and how honourably doth he mention him to his master! "Behold, in this city is a man of God, and he is an honourable man, all that he saith cometh to pass." God's prophets are public persons; as their function, so their notice concerns every man. There is no reason God should abate any of the respect due to his ministers under the gospel. St Paul's suit is both universal and everlasting; "I beseech you, brethren, know them that labour amongst you."

The chief praise is to be able to give good advice; the next is, to take it. Saul is easily induced to condescend. He, whose curiosity led him voluntarily at last to the witch of Endor, is now led at first, by good counsel, to the man of God; neither is his care in going less commendable than his will to go. For, as a man that had been catechised not to go unto God empty-handed, he asks, "What shall we bring unto the man? what have we?" The case is well altered in our times. Every man thinks, what may I keep back? There is no gain so sweet, as of a robbed altar; yet God's charge is no less under the gospel. "Let him that is taught make his teacher partake of all." As this faithful care of Saul was a just presage of success, more than he looked for, or could expect: so the sacrilegious unthankfulness of many, bodes that ruin to their soul and estate, which they could not have grace to fear.

He, that knew the prophet's abode, knew also the honour of his place; he could not but know that Samuel was a mixt person, the judge of Israel and the seer: yet both Saul and his servant purpose to present him with the fourth part of a shekel, to the value of about our fivepence. They had learned, that thankfulness was not to be measured of good men, by the weight, but by the will of the retributor. How much more will God accept the small offerings of his weak servants, when he sees them proceed from great love!

The very maids of the city can give directions to the prophet: they had listened after the holy affairs; they had heard of the sacrifice, and could tell of the necessity of Samuel's presence. Those that live within the sunshine of religion, cannot but be somewhat coloured with those beams. Where there is practice and example of piety in the better sort, there will be a reflection of it upon the meanest. It is no small benefit to live in religious and holy places. We shall be much to blame, if all goodness fall beside us. Yea, so skilful were these damsels in the fashions of their public sacrifices, that they could instruct Saul and his servant unasked, how the people would not eat, till Samuel came to bless the sacrifice. This meeting was not more a sacrifice, than it was a feast. These two agree well. We have never so much cause to rejoice in feasting, as when we have duly served our God. The sacrifice was a feast to God, the other to men. The body may eat and drink with contentment, when the soul hath been first fed, and hath first feasted the Maker of both. "Go, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy drink with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works." The sacrifice was before consecrated, when it was offered to God; but it was not consecrated to them, till Samuel blessed it; his blessing made that meat holy to the guests, which was formerly hallowed to God. All creatures were made good, and took holiness from him, which gave them their being. Our sin brought that curse upon them, which, unless our prayers remove it, cleaves to them still, so as we receive them not without a curse. We are not our own friends, except our prayers help to take that away which our sin hath brought, that so to the clean all may be clean. It is an unmannerly godlessness to take God's creatures without the leave of their Maker, and well may God withhold his blessing from them which have not the grace to ask it.

Those guests, which were so religious that they would not eat their sacrifice unblessed, might have blessed it themselves. Every man might pray, though every man might not sacrifice; yet would they not either eat, or bless, while they looked for the presence of a prophet. Every christian may sanctify his own meat; but, where those are present that are peculiarly sanctified to God, this service is fittest for them. It is commendable to teach children the practice of thanksgiving, but the best is ever most meet to bless our tables, and those especially whose office it is to offer our prayers to God.

Little did Saul think, that his coming and his errand was so noted of God, as that it was fore-signified unto the prophet; and now, behold, Samuel is told a day before, of the man, the time, and the place of his meeting. The eye of God's providence is no less over all our actions, all our motions. We cannot go any whither without him: he tells all our steps. Since it pleaseth God therefore to take notice of us, much more should we take notice of him, and walk with him, in whom we move. Saul came, besides his expectation, to the prophet: he had no thought of any such purpose, till his servant made this sudden motion unto him of visiting Samuel; and yet God says to his prophet, "I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin." The overruling hand of the Almighty works us insensibly, and all our affairs, to his own secret determinations; so as, while we think to do our own wills, we do his. Our own intentions we may know, God's purposes we know not: we must go the way that we are called, let him lead us to what end he pleaseth. It is our duty to resign ourselves and our ways to the disposition of God, and patiently and thankfully to wait the issue of his decrees. The same God, that fore-showed Saul to Samuel, now points to him. "See, this is the man," and commands the prophet to anoint him governor over Israel. He, that told Saul before he came, knew before he came into the world, what a man, what a king he would be; yet he chooseth him out and enjoins his inunction. It is one of the greatest praises of God's wisdom, that he can turn the evil of men to his own glory. Advancement is not ever a sign of love, either to the man or to the place. It had been better for Saul, that his head had been ever dry. Some God raiseth up in judgment, that they may fall the more uneasily: there are no men so miserable as those that are great and evil.

It seems that Samuel bore no great port in his outside, for that Saul, not discerning him either by his habit or attendants, comes to him, and asks him for the seer; yet was Samuel as yet the judge of Israel; the substitution of his sons had not displaced himself. There is an affable familiarity that becometh greatness. It is not good for eminent persons to stand always upon the height of their state; but so to behave themselves, that as their sociable carriage may not breed contempt, so their over-highness may not breed a servile fearfulness in their people.

How kindly doth Samuel entertain and invite Saul, yet it was he only that should receive wrong by the future royalty of Saul! Who would not have looked, that aged Samuel should have emulated rather the glory of his young rival, and have looked churlishly upon the man that should rob him of his authority? Yet now, as if he came on purpose to gratify him, he bids him to the feast, he honours him with the chief seat, he reserves a select morsel for him, he tells him ingenuously the news of his ensuing sovereignty, "On whom is set the desire of all Israel, is it not upon thee, and thy father's house?" Wise and holy men, as they are not ambitious of their own burden, so they are not unwilling to be eased, when God pleaseth to discharge them; neither can they envy those whom God lifteth above their heads. They make an idol of honour, that are troubled with their own freedom, or grudge at the promotion of others.

Doubtless Saul was much amazed with this strange salutation, and news of the prophet: and how modestly doth he put it off! as that which was neither fit nor likely, disparaging his tribe, in respect of the rest of Israel; his father's family, in respect of the tribe; and himself, in respect of his father's family. Neither did his humility stoop below the truth: for, as Benjamin was the youngest son of Israel, so he was now by much the least tribe of Israel. They had not yet recovered that universal slaughter which they had received from the hands of their brethren, whereby a tribe was almost lost to Israel: yet, even out of the remainder of Benjamin, doth God choose the man that shall command Israel: out of the rubbish of Benjamin doth God raise the throne. That is not ever the best and fattest which God chooseth; but that which God chooseth is ever the fittest. The strength or weakness of means is neither spur nor bridle to the determinate choices of God; yea, rather, he holds it the greatest proof of his freedóm and omnipotence to advance the unlikeliest. It was no hollow and feigned excuse that Saul makes, to put off that which he would fain enjoy, and to cause honour to follow him the more eagerly: it was the sincere truth of his humility, that so dejected him under the hand of God's prophet. Fair beginnings are no sound proof of our proceedings and ending well. How often hath a bashful childhood ended in an impudency of youth; a strict entrance, in licentiousness; early forwardness, in atheism! There might be a civil meekness in Saul; true grace there was not in him. They that be good bear more fruit in their age.

Saul had but fivepence in his purse to give the prophet. The prophet, after much good cheer, gives him the kingdom: he bestows the oil of royal consecration on his head, the kisses of homage upon his face, and sends him away rich in thoughts and expectation. And now, lest his astonishment should end in distrust, he settles his assurance, by forewarnings of those events which he should find in his way: he tells him whom he shall meet, what they shall say, how himself shall be affected. That all these, and himself, might be so many witnesses of his following coronation, every word confirmed him. For well might he think, He that can foretell me the motions and words of others, cannot fail in mine: especially, when (as Samuel had prophesied to him) he found himself to prophesy: his prophecy did enough foretell his kingdom. No sooner did Samuel turn his back from Saul, but God gave him another heart, lifting up his thoughts and disposition to the pitch of a king. The calling of God never leaves a man unchanged; neither did God ever employ any man in his service, whom he did not enable to the work he set him; especially those whom he raised up to the supply of his own place, and the representation of himself. It is no marvel if princes excel the vulgar in gifts, no less than in dignity. Their crown and their hearts are both in one and the same hand. If God did not add to their powers, as well as their honours, there would be no equality.

CONTEMPLATION V.—THE INAUGURATION OF SAUL.

GOD hath secretly distined Saul to the kingdom. It could not content Israel, that Samuel knew this; the lots must so decide the choice as if it had not been predetermined: that God, which is ever constant to his own decrees, makes the lots to find him out whom Samuel had anointed. If once we have notice of the will of God, we may be confident of the issue. There is no chance to the Almighty: even casual things are no less necessary, in their first cause, than the natural. So far did Saul trust the prediction and oil of Samuel, that he hides him among the stuff. He knew where the lots would light before they were cast; this was but a modest declination of that honour which he saw must come: his very withdrawing showed some expectation, why else should he have hid himself, rather than the other Israelites? Yet could he not hope, his subduing himself could disappoint the purpose of God: he well knew, that he which found out and designed his name amongst the thousands of Israel, would easily find out his person in a tent. When once we know God's decree, in vain shall we strive against it: before we know it, it is indifferent for us to work to the likeliest.

I cannot blame Saul for hiding himself from a kingdom, especially of Israel. Honour is heavy, when it comes upon the best terms: how should it be otherwise, when all men's cares are cast upon one; but most of all in a troubled estate? No man can put to sea without danger; but he that launcheth forth in a tempest, can expect nothing but the hardest event; such was the condition of Israel. Their old enemy the Philistines were stilled with that fearful thunder of God, as finding what it was to war against the Almighty. There were adversaries enough besides in their borders: it was but a hollow truce that was betwixt Israel and their heathenish neighbours, and Nahash was now at their gates. Well did Saul know the difference between a peaceful government, and the perilous and wearisome tumults of war. The quietest throne is full of cares; but the perplexed, of dangers. Cares and dangers drove Saul into this corner, to hide his head from a crown: these made him choose rather to lie obscurely among the baggage of his tent, than to sit gloriously in the throne of state. This hiding could do nothing but show, that he both suspected lest he should be chosen, and desired he should not be chosen. That God from whom the hills and the rocks could not conceal him, brings him forth to the light, so much more longed for, as he was more unwilling to be seen, and more applauded, as he was more longed for.

Now then, when Saul is drawn forth in the midst of the eager expectation of Israel, modesty and godliness showed themselves in his face. The crowd cannot hide him, whom the stuff had hid: as if he had been made to be seen, he overlooks all Israel in height of stature, for presage of the eminence of his state; "From the shoulders upwards, was he higher than any of the people." Israel sees their lots are fallen upon a noted man, one whose person showed he was born to be a king: and now all the people shout for joy; they have their longing, and applaud their own happiness, and their king's honour. How easy is it for us to mistake our own estates! to rejoice in that which we shall find the just cause of our humiliation! The end of a thing is better than the beginning. The safest way is to reserve our joy, till we have good proof of the worthiness and fitness of the object. What are we the better for having a blessing, if we know not how to use it? The office and observance of a king was uncouth to Israel: Samuel therefore informs the people of their mutual duties, and writes them in a book, and lays it up before the Lord; otherwise, novelty might have been a warrant for their ignorance, and ignorance for neglect. There are reciprocal respects of princes and people, which, if they be not observed, government languisheth into confusion; these Samuel faithfully teacheth them. Though he may not be their judge, yet he will be their prophet; he will instruct, if he may not rule; yea, he will instruct him that shall rule. There is no king absolute, but he that is the King of all gods. Earthly monarchs must walk by a rule, which, if they transgress, they shall be accountable to him that is higher than the highest, who hath deputed them. Not out of care of civility, so much as conscience, must every Samuel labour to keep even terms betwixt kings and subjects, prescribing just moderation to the one, to the other obedience and loyalty, which, whoever endeavours to trouble, is none of the friends of God, or his church.

The most and best applaud their new king; some wicked ones despised him, and said, "How shall he save us? It was not the might of his parents, the goodliness of his person, the privilege of his lot, the fame of his prophesying, the panegyric of Samuel, that could shield him from contempt, or win him the hearts of all. There was never yet any man, to whom some took not exception. It is not possible either to please or displease all men; while some men are in love with vice, as deeply as others with virtue, and some as ill dislike virtue, if not for itself, yet for contradiction. They well saw Saul choosed not himself; they saw him worthy to have been chosen, if the election should have been carried by voices, and those voices by their eyes; they saw him unwilling to hold, or yield, when he was chosen; yet they will envy him. What fault could they find in him whom God had chosen? his parentage was equal, his person above them, his inward parts more above them than the outward. Malecontents will rather devise than want causes of flying out; and rather than fail, the universal approbation of others is ground enough of their dislike. It is a vain ambition of those that would be loved of all. The Spirit of God, when he enjoins us peace, withal he adds, "If it be possible;" and favour is more than peace. A man's comfort must be in himself, the conscience of deserving well.

The neighbouring Ammonites could not have but heard of God's fearful vengeance upon the Philistines, and yet they will be taking up the quarrel against Israel. Nahash comes up against Jabesh-gilead. Nothing but grace can teach us to make use of others' judgments. Wicked men are not moved with ought that falls besides them; they trust nothing but their own smart. What fearful judgments doth God execute every day! Resolute sinners take no notice of them, and are grown so peremptory, as if God had never showed dislike of their ways.

The Gileadites were not more base than Nahash the Ammonite was cruel. The Gileadites would buy their peace with servility, Nahash would sell them a servile peace for their right eyes. Jephthah the Gileadite did yet stick in the stomach of Ammon; and now they think their revenge cannot be too bloody. It is a wonder that he, which would offer so merciless a condition to Israel, would yield to the motion of any delay; he meant nothing but shame and death to the Israelites, yet he condescends to a seven days' respite: perhaps his confidence made him thus careless. Howsoever, it was the restraint of God that gave this breath to Israel, and this opportunity to Saul's courage and victory. The enemies of God's church cannot be so malicious as they would, cannot approve themselves so malicious as they are. God so holds them in sometimes, that a stander-by would think them favourable. The news of Gilead's distress hath soon filled and afflicted Israel; the people think of no remedy but their pity and tears. Evils are easily grieved for, not easily redressed: only Saul is more stirred with indignation than sorrow: that God, which put into him a spirit of prophecy, now puts into him a spirit of fortitude. He was before appointed to the throne, not settled in the throne; he followed the beasts in the field, when he should have commanded men.

Now, as one that would be a king no less by merit than election, he takes upon him, and performs the rescue of Gilead; he assembles Israel, he leads them, he raiseth the siege, breaks the troops, cuts the throats of the Ammonites. When God hath any exploit to perform, he raiseth up the heart of some chosen instrument with heroical motions for the achievement. When all hearts are cold and dead, it is a sign of intended destruction.

This day hath made Saul a complete king; and now the thankful Israelites begin to inquire after those discontented mutineers, which had refused allegiance unto so worthy a commander—"Bring those men, that we may slay them." This sedition had deserved death, though Saul had been foiled at Gilead; but now his happy victory whets the people much more to a desire of this just execution. Saul, to whom the injury was done, hinders the revenge—"There shall no man die this day, for today the Lord hath saved Israel;" that his fortitude might not go beyond his mercy. How noble were these beginnings of Saul! His prophecy showed him miraculously wise, his battle and victory no less valiant, his pardon of his rebels as merciful. There was not more power showed in overcoming the Ammonites than in overcoming himself, and the impotent malice of these mutinous Israelites. Now Israel sees they have a king, that can both shed blood and spare it; that can shed the Ammonites' blood and spare theirs. His mercy wins those hearts whom his valour could not. As in God, so in his deputies, mercy and justice should be inseparable; wheresoever these two go asunder, government follows them into distraction, and ends in ruin. If it had been a wrong offered to Samuel, the forbearance of the revenge had not been so commendable, although, upon the day of so happy a deliverance, perhaps it had not been seasonable. A man hath reason to be most bold with himself. It is no praise of mercy, since it is a fault in justice, to remit another man's satisfaction; his own he may.

CONTEMPLATION VI.—SAMUEL'S CONTESTATION.

Every one can be a friend to him that prospereth. By this victory hath Saul as well conquered the obstinacy of his own people. Now there is no Israelite that rejoiceth not in Saul's kingdom. No sooner have they done objecting to Saul, than Samuel begins to expostulate with them. The same day wherein they began to be pleased, God shows himself angry. All the passages of their proceedings offended him, he deferred to let them know it till now that the kingdom was settled, and their hearts lifted up. Now doth God cool their courage and joy, with a back-reckoning for their forwardness. God will not let his people run away with the arrearages of their sins; but, when they least think of it, calls them to an acount. All this while was God angry with their rejection of Samuel; yet, as if there had been nothing but peace, he gives them a victory over their enemies, he gives way to their joy in their election; now he lets them know, that after their peace-offerings he hath a quarrel with them. God may be angry enough with us, while we outwardly prosper. It is the wisdom of God to take his best advantages; he suffers us to go on, till we should come to enjoy the fruit of our sin, till we seem past the danger either of conscience or punishment; then, even when we begin to be past the feeling of our sin, we shall begin to feel his displeasure for our sins; this is only where he loves, where he would both forgive and reclaim. He hath now to do with his Israel. But where he means utter vengeance, he lets men harden themselves to a reprobate senselessness, and make up their own measure without contradiction, as purposing to reckon with them but once for ever.

Samuel had dissuaded them before, he reproves them not until now. If he had thus bent himself against them, ere the settling of the election, he had troubled Israel in that which God took occasion by their sin to establish; his opposition would have savoured of respects to himself, whom the wrong of this innovation chiefly concerned. Now therefore, when they are sure of their king and their king of them, when he hath set even terms betwixt them mutually, he lets them see how they were at odds with God. We must ever dislike sins, we may not ever show it. Discretion in the choice of seasons for reproving is no less commendable and necessary, than zeal and faithfulness in reproving. Good physicians use not to evacuate the body in extremities of heat or cold; wise mariners do not hoist sails in every wind.

First doth Samuel begin to clear his own innocence, ere he dare charge them with their sin. He that will cast a stone at an offender, must be free himself, otherways he condemns and executes himself in another person. The conscience stops the mouth of the guilty man, and chokes him with that sin which lies in his own breast, and, having not come forth by a penitent confession, cannot find the way out in a reproof, or, if he do reprove, he doth more shame himself, than reform another. He, that was the judge of Israel, would not now judge himself, but would be judged by Israel: "Whose ox have I taken? whose ass have I taken? or to whom have I done wrong?" No doubt Samuel found himself guilty before God of many private infirmities; but for his public carriage he appeals to men. A man's heart can best judge of himself; others can best judge of his actions. As another man's conscience and approbation cannot bear us out before God, so cannot our own before men; for ofttimes that action is censured by the beholders as wrongful, wherein we applaud our own justice. Happy is that man that can be acquitted by himself in private, in public by others, by God in both. Standers-by may see more. It is very safe for a man to look into himself by others' eyes. In vain shall a man's heart absolve him that is condemned by his actions.

It was not so much the trial of his carriage that Samuel appealed for, as his justification. Not for his own comfort, so much as their conviction. His innocence hath not done him service enough, unless it shame them, and make them confess themselves faulty. In so many years, wherein Samuel judged Israel, it cannot be, but many thousand causes passed his hands, wherein both parties could not possibly be pleased; yet so clear doth he find his heart and hands, that he dare make the grieved part judges of his judgment. A good conscience will make a man undauntedly confident, and dare put him upon any trial; where his own heart strikes him not, it bids him challenge all the world, and take up all comers. How happy a thing is it for man to be his own friend and patron! He needs not to fear foreign broils that is at peace at home. Contrarily, he that hath a false and foul heart, lies at every man's mercy, lives slavishly, and is fain to daub up a rotten peace with the basest conditions. Truth is not afraid of any light; and therefore dare suffer her wares to be carried from a dim shop-board unto the street door. Perfect gold will be but the purer with trying, whereas falsehood, being a work of darkness, loves darkness, and therefore seeks where it may work closest.

This very appellation cleared Samuel, but the people's attestation cleared him more. Innocency and uprightness become every man well, but most public persons, who shall be else obnoxious to every offender. The throne and the pulpit, of all places, call for holiness, no more for example of good, than for liberty of controlling evil. All magistrates swear to do that, which Samuel protesteth he hath done; if their oath were so verified, as Samuel's protestation, it were a shame for the state not to be happy. The sins of our teachers are the teachers of sin; the sins of governors do both command and countenance evil. This very acquitting of Samuel was the accusation of themselves; for how could it be but faulty to cast off a faultless governor? If he had not taken away an ox, or an ass from them, why do they take away his authority? They could not have thus cleared Saul at the end of his reign. It was just with God, since they were weary of a just ruler, to punish them with an unjust.

He, that appealed to them for his own uprightness, durst not appeal to them from their own wickedness, but appeals to heaven from them. Men are commonly flatterers of their own cases; it must be a strong evidence, that will make a sinner convicted in himself. Nature hath so many shifts to cozen itself in this spiritual verdict, that unless it be taken in the manner, it will hardly yield to a truth; either she will deny the fact, or the fault, or the measure; and now, in this case, they might seem to have some fair pretences; for though Samuel was righteous, yet his sons were corrupt. To cut off all excuses, therefore, Samuel appeals to God, the highest judge, for his sentence of their sin, and dares trust to a miraculous conviction. It was now their wheat harvest; the hot and dry air of that climate did not wont to afford in that season so much moist vapour as might raise a cloud either for rain or thunder. He that knew God could, and would do both these, without the help of second causes, puts the trial upon this issue. Had not Samuel before consulted with his Maker, and received warrant for his act, it had been presumption and tempting of God, which was now a noble improvement of faith. Rather than Israel shall go clear away with a sin, God will accuse and arraign them from heaven. No sooner hath Samuel's voice ceased, than God's voice begins. Every crack of thunder spake judgment against the rebellious Israelites, and every drop of rain was a witness of their sin; and now they found they had displeased Him, which ruleth in the heaven, by rejecting the man that ruled for him on earth. The thundering voice of God, that had lately in their sight confounded the Philistines, they now understood to speak fearful things against them. No marvel, if they now fell upon their knees, not to Saul, whom they had chosen, but to Samuel, who, being thus cast off by them, is thus countenanced in heaven.

CONTEMPLATION VII.—OF SAUL'S SACRIFICE.

God never meant the kingdom should either stay long in the tribe of Benjamin, or remove suddenly from the person of Saul. Many years did Saul reign over Israel; yet God computes him but two years a king. That is not accounted of God to be done, which is not lawfully done. When God, which chose Saul, rejected him, he was no more a king, but a tyrant. Israel obeyed him still; but God makes no reckoning of him as his deputy, but as an usurper.

Saul was of good years when he was advanced to the kingdom. His son Jonathan, the first year of his father's reign, could lead a thousand Israelites into the field, and give a foil to the Philistines; and now Israel could not think themselves less happy in their prince than in their king. Jonathan is the heir of his father's victory, as well as of his valour and his estate The Philistines were quiet, after those first thunderclaps, all the time of Samuel's government; now they begin to stir under Saul.

How utterly is Israel disappointed in their hopes! That security and protection, which they promised themselves in the name of a king, they found in a prophet, failed of in a warrior. They were more safe under the mantle than under arms. Both enmity and safeguard are from heaven. Goodness hath been ever a stronger guard than valour. It is the surest policy always to have peace with God.

We find, by the spoils, that the Philistines had some battles with Israel which are not recorded. After the thunder had scared them into a peace, and restitution of all the bordering cities, from Ekron to Gath, they had taken new heart, and so enslaved Israel, that they had neither weapon nor smith left among them; yet, even in this miserable nakedness of Israel, have they both fought and overcome. Now might you have seen the unarmed Israelites marching with their slings and plough-staves, and hooks and forks, and other instruments of their husbandry, against a mighty and well-furnished enemy, and returning laden both with arms and victory. No army is of proof against the Almighty; neither is he unweaponed that carries the revenge of God. There is the same disadvantage in our spiritual conflicts: we are turned naked to principalities and powers. Whilst we go under the conduct of the Prince of our peace, we cannot but be bold and victorious.

Vain men think to overpower God with munition and multitude; the Philistines are not any way more strong than in conceit. Thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, footmen like the sand for number, make them scorn Israel no less than Israel fears them. When I see the miraculous success which had blessed the Israelites in all their late conflicts, with these very Philistines, with the Ammonites, I cannot but wonder how they could fear. They, which in the time of their sin, found God to raise such trophies over their enemies, run now into caves, and rocks, and pits, to hide them from the faces of men, when they found God reconciled, and themselves penitent. No Israelite but hath some cowardly blood in him. If we had no fear, faith would have no mastery; yet these fearful Israelites shall cut the throats of those confident Philistines. Doubt and resolution are not meet measures of our success: a presumptuous confidence goes commonly bleeding home, when an humble fear returns in triumph. Fear drives those Israelites which dare show their heads out of the caves unto Saul, and makes them cling unto their new king. How troublesome were the beginnings of Saul's honour! Surely, if that man had not exceeded Israel no less in courage than in stature, he had not now hid himself in a cave, who before hid himself in the stuff. But now, though the Israelites ran away from him, yet he ran not away from them. It was not any doubt of Saul's valour that put his people to their heels, it was the absence of Samuel. If the prophet had come up, Israel would never have run away from their king. While they had a Samuel alone, they were never well till they had a Saul; now they have a Saul, they are as far from contentment, because they want a Samuel: unless both join together, they think there can be no safety. Where the temporal and spiritual state combine not together, there can follow nothing but distraction in the people. The prophets receive and deliver the will of God, kings execute it. The prophets are directed by God, the people are directed by their kings. Where men do not see God in his ordinances, their hearts cannot but fail them, both in their respects to their superiors, and their courage in themselves. Piety is the mother of perfect subjection. As all authority is derived from heaven, so it is thence established. Those governors that would command the hearts of men, must show them God in their faces.

No Israelite can think himself safe without a prophet. Saul had given them good proof of his fortitude, in his late victory over the Ammonites; but then proclamation was made before the fight, through all the country, that every man should come up after Saul and Samuel. If Samuel had not been with Saul, they would rather have ventured the loss of their oxen, than the hazard of themselves. How much less should we presume of any safety in our spiritual combats, when we have not a prophet to lead us! It is all one, saving that it savours of more contempt, not to have God's seers, and not to use them. He can be no true Israelite, that is not distressed with the want of a Samuel.

As one that had learned to begin his rule in obedience, Saul stays seven days in Gilgal, according to the prophet's direction, and still he looks long for Samuel, which had promised his presence; six days he expects, and part of the seventh, yet Samuel is not come. The Philistines draw near, the Israelites run away, Samuel comes not, they must fight, God must be supplicated; what should Saul do? Rather than God should want a sacrifice, and the people satisfaction, Saul will command that which he knew Samuel would, if he were present, both command and execute. It is not possible, thinks he, that God should be displeased with a sacrifice; he cannot but be displeased with indevotion. Why do the people run from me, but for want of means to make God sure? What would Samuel rather wish, than that we should be godly? The act shall be the same, the only difference shall be in the person. If Samuel be wanting to us, we will not be wanting to God; it is but an holy prevention to be devout unbidden. Upon this conceit he commands a sacrifice: Saul's sins make no great show, yet are they still heinously taken; the impiety of them was more hidden and inward from all eyes but God's. If Saul were among the prophets before, will he now be among the priests? Can there be any devotion in disobedience? O vain man! what can it avail thee to sacrifice to God against God? Hypocrites rest only in formalites; if the outward act be done, it sufficeth them, though the ground be distrust, the manner unreverence, the carriage presumption.

What then should Saul have done? Upon the trust of God and Samuel he should have staid out the last hour, and have secretly sacrificed himself and his prayers unto that God which loves obedience above sacrifice. Our faith is most commendable in the last act; it is no praise to hold out until we be hard driven. Then, when we are forsaken of means, to live by faith in our God, is worthy of a crown. God will have no worship of our devising: we may only do what he bids us, not bid what he commands not. Never did any true piety arise out of the corrupt puddle of man's brain. If it flow not from heaven, it is odious to heaven. What was it that did thus taint the valour of Saul with this weakness, but distrust? He saw some Israelites go, he thought all would go: he saw the Philistines come, he saw Samuel came not; his diffidence was guilty of his misdevotion. There is no sin that hath not its ground from unbelief; this, as it was the first infection of our pure nature, so is the true source of all corruption: man could not sin if he distrusted not.

The sacrifice is no sooner ended, than Samuel is come; and why came he no sooner? He could not be a seer, and not know how much he was looked for, how troublesome and dangerous his absence must needs be; he that could tell Saul that he should prophesy, could tell that he would sacrifice; yet he purposely forbears to come, for the trial of him that must be the champion of God. Samuel durst not have done thus, but by direction from his Master. It is the ordinary course of God to prove us by delays, and to drive to exigents, that we may show what we are. He that anointed Saul, might lawfully from God control him. There must be discretion, there may not be partiality in our censures of the greatest. God makes difference of sins, none of persons. If we make difference of sins, according to persons, we are unfaithful both to God and man. Scarce is Saul warm in his kingdom, when he hath even lost it. Samuel's first words, after the inauguration, are of Saul's rejection, and the choice and establishment of his successor. It was ever God's purpose to settle the kingdom in Judah. He, that took occasion by the people's sin to raise up Saul in Benjamin, takes occasion by Saul's sin to establish the crown upon David. In human probability the kingdom was fixed upon Saul and his more worthy son. In God's decree it did but pass through the hands of Benjamin to Judah. Besides trouble, how fickle are these earthly glories! Saul doubtless looked upon Jonathan as the inheritor of his crown; and, behold, ere his peaceable possession, he hath lost it from himself. Our sins strip us not of our hopes in heaven only, but of our earthly blessings. The way to entail a comfortable prosperity upon our seed after us, is our conscionable obedience to God.

CONTEMPLATION VIII.—JONATHAN'S VICTORY AND SAUL'S OATH.

It is wonder if Saul's courage was much cooled with the heavy news of his rejection. After this he stays under the pomegranate-tree in Gibeah: he stirs not towards the garrison of the Philistines. As hope is the mother of fortitude, so nothing doth more breed cowardliness than despair. Every thing dismays that heart which God hath put out of protection. Worthy Jonathan, which sprung from Saul, as some sweet imp grows out of a crab-stock, is therefore full of valour, because full of faith. He well knew, that he should have nothing but discouragements from his father's fear; as rather choosing therefore to avoid all the blocks that might lie in the way, than to leap over them, he departs secretly without the dismission of his father, or notice of the people; only God leads him, and his armour-bearer follows him. O admirable faith of Jonathan, whom neither the steepness of rocks, nor the multitude of enemies, can dissuade from so unlikely an assault! Is it possible, that two men, whereof one was weaponless, should dare to think of encountering so many thousands? O divine power of faith, that in all difficulties and attempts, makes a man more than men, and regards no more armies of men than swarms of flies? There is no restraint to the Lord, saith he, to save with many, or by few. It was not so great news, that Saul should be amongst the prophets, as that such a word should come from the son of Saul.

If his father had but so much divinity, he had not sacrificed. The strength of his God is the ground of his strength in God. The question is not, what Jonathan can do, but what God can do, whose power is not in the means, but in himself. That man's faith is well underlaid that upholds itself by the omnipotency of God. Thus the father of the faithful built his assurance upon the power of the Almighty. But many things God can do, which he will not do. How knowest thou, Jonathan, that God will be as forward, as he is able, to give thee victory? For this, saith he, I have a watch-word from God out of the mouths of the Philistines: "If they say, Come up, we will go up: for God hath delivered them into our hands. If they say, Tarry till we come to you, we will stand still." Jonathan was too wise to trust unto a casual presage. There might be some far-fetched conjectures of the event from the word. We will come to you, was a threat of resolution: Come you to us, was a challenge of fear; or, perhaps, Come up to us, was a word of insultation from them that trusted to the inaccessibleness of the place, and multitudes of men. Insultation is from pride, pride argued a fall: but faith hath nothing to do with probabilities, as that which acknowledgeth no argument but demonstration. If there had not been an instinct from God of this assured warrant of success, Jonathan had presumed instead of believing, and had tempted that God whom he professed to glorify by his trust.

There can be no faith where there is no promise; and, where there is a promise, there can be no presumption. Words are voluntary; the tongues of the Philistines were as free to say, Tarry, as Come. That God, in whom our very tongues move, overruled them so, as now they shall speak that word, which will cut their own throats. They knew no more harm in Come, than Tarry; both were alike safe for the sound, for the sense; but he that put a signification of their slaughter in the one, not in the other, did put that word into their mouths, whereby they might invite their own destruction. The disposition of our words is from the providence of the Almighty. God and our hearts have not always the same meaning in our speeches. In those words which we speak at random, or out of affectation, God hath a further drift of his own glory, and perhaps our judgment. If wicked men say, Our tongues are our own, they could not say so, but from Him whom they defy in saying so, and who makes their tongue their executioner.

No sooner doth Jonathan hear this invitation, than he answers it. He, whose hands had learned never to fail his heart, puts himself upon his hands and knees to climb up into this danger; the exploit was not more difficult than the way; the pain of the passage was equal to the peril of the enterprise, that his faith might equally triumph over both. He doth not say, How shall I get up? much less, Which way shall I get down again? But, as if the ground were level, and the action dangerless, he puts himself into the view of the Philistines. Faith is never so glorious, as when it hath most opposition, and will not see it. Reason looks ever to the means, faith to the end; and, instead of consulting how to effect, resolves what shall be effected. The way to heaven is more steep, more painful. O God, how perilous a passage hast thou appointed for thy labouring pilgrims! If difficulties will discourage us, we shall but climb to fall. When we are lifting up our foot to the last step, there are the Philistines of death, of temptations, to grapple with. Give us but faith, and turn us loose to the spite either of earth or hell.

Jonathan is now on the top of the hill; and now, as if he had an army at his heels, he flies upon the host of the Philistines; his hands, that might have been weary with climbing, are immediately commanded to fight, and deal as many death-blows to the amazed enemy. He needs not walk far for this execution; himself and his armour-bearer, in one half acre's space, have slain twenty Philistines. It is not long since Jonathan smote their garrison in the hill of Geba; perhaps from that time his name and presence carried terror in it; but sure, if the Philistines had not seen and felt more than a man, in the face and hands of Jonathan, they had not so easily grovelled in death. The blows and shrieks cannot but affect the next, who, with a ghastly noise, run away from death, and affright their fellows no less than themselves are affrighted. The clamour and fear runs on, like fire in a train, to the very foremost ranks; every man would fly, and thinks there is so much more cause of flight, for that his ears apprehend all, his eyes nothing. Each man thinks his fellow stands in his way: and, therefore, instead of turning upon him which was the cause of their flight, they bend their swords upon those whom they imagine to be the hinderers of their flight: and now a miraculous astonishment hath made the Philistines Jonathan's champions and executioners. He follows and kills those which helped to kill others; and the more he killed, the more they feared and fled, and the more they killed each other in the flight: and, that fear itself might prevent Jonathan in killing them, the earth itself trembles under them. Thus doth God at once strike them with his own hand, with Jonathan's, with theirs, and makes them run away from life, while they would fly from an enemy. Where the Almighty purposes destruction to any people, he needs not call in foreign powers; he needs not any hands or weapons but their own; he can make vast bodies die by no other death than their own weight. We cannot be sure to be friends among ourselves, while God is our enemy.

The Philistines fly fast, but the news of their flight overruns them, even unto Saul's pomegranate-tree. The watchmen discern afar off a flight and execution. Search is made, Jonathan is found missing; Saul will consult with the ark. Hypocrites, while they have leisure, will perhaps be holy; for some fits of devotion they cannot be bettered. But when the tumult increased, Saul's piety decreases. It is now no season to talk with a priest; withdraw thine hand, Ahaiah, the ephod must give place to armies; it is more time to fight, than to pray: what needs he God's guidance, when he sees his way before him? He, that before would needs sacrifice ere he fought, will now, in the other extreme, fight in a wilful indevotion. Worldly minds regard holy duties no further, than may stand with their own carnal purposes: very easy occasions shall interrupt them in their religious intentions; like unto children, which, if a bird do but fly in their way, cast their eye from their book.

But if Saul serve not God in one kind, he will serve him in another; if he honour him not by attending on the ark, he will honour him by a vow: his negligence in the one is recompensed with his zeal in the other. All Israel is adjured not to eat any food until the evening. Hypocrisy is ever masked with a blind and thankless zeal. To wait upon the ark, and to consult with God's priest, in all cases of importance, was a direct commandment of God; to eat no food in the pursuit of their enemies, was not commanded: Saul leaves that which he was bidden, and does that which he was not required. To eat no food all day was more difficult than to attend an hour upon the ark: the voluntary services of hypocrites are many times more painful than the duties enjoined by God.

In what awe did all Israel stand of the oath; even of Saul! It was not their own vow, but Saul's for them; yet, coming into the wood, where they saw the honey dropping, and found the meat as ready as their appetite, they dare not touch that sustenance, and will rather endure famine, and fainting, than an indiscreet curse. Doubtless, God had brought those bees thither, on purpose to try the constancy of Israel. Israel could not but think that which Jonathan said, that the vow was unadvised and injurious; yet they will rather die than violate it. How sacred should we hold the obligation of our own vows, in things just and expedient, when the bond of another's rash vow is thus indissoluble!

There was a double mischief followed upon Saul's oath, an abatement of the victory, and eating with the blood: for, on the one side, the people were so faint, that they were more likely to die than kill; they could neither run nor strike in this emptiness; neither hands nor feet can do their office, when the stomach is neglected. On the other, an unmeet forbearance causes a ravenous repast. Hunger knows neither choice, nor order, nor measure: the one of these was a wrong to Israel: the other was a wrong done by Israel to God: Saul's zeal was guilty of both. A rash vow is seldom ever free from inconvenience. The heart that hath unnecessarily entangled itself, draws mischief either upon itself or others.

Jonathan was ignorant of his father's adjuration; he knew no reason why he should not refresh himself, in so profitable a service, with a little taste of honey upon his spear: full well had he deserved this unsought dainty. And now, behold, his honey is turned into gall: if it were sweet in the mouth, it was bitter in the soul; if the eyes of his body were enlightened, the light of God's countenance was clouded by this act. After he heard of the oath, he pleads justly against it, the loss of so fair an opportunity of revenge, and the trouble of Israel; yet neither his reasons against the oath, nor his ignorance of the oath, can excuse him from a sin of ignorance in violating that which first he knew not, and then knew unreasonable. Now Saul's leisure would serve him to ask counsel of God: as before Saul would not inquire, so now God will not answer. Well might Saul have found sins enough of his own, whereto to impute this silence. He hath grace enough to know that God was offended, and to guess at the cause of his offence. Sooner will a hypocrite find out another man's sin than his own, and now he swears more rashly to punish with death the breach of that which he had sworn rashly. The lots were cast, and Saul prays for the decision: Jonathan is taken. Even the prayers of wicked men are sometimes heard, although in justice, not in mercy. Saul himself was punished not a little in the fall of this lot upon Jonathan. Surely Saul sinned more in making this vow, than Jonathan in breaking it unwittingly; and now the father smarts for the rashness of his double vow, by the unjust sentence of death upon so worthy a son. God had never singled out Jonathan by his lot, if he had not been displeased with his act. Vows rashly made, may not be rashly broken. If the thing we have vowed be not evil in itself, or in the effect, we cannot violate it without evil. Ignorance cannot acquit, if it can abate our sin. It is like, if Jonathan had heard his father's adjuration, he had not transgressed; his absence, at the time of that oath, cannot excuse him from displeasure. What shall become of those, which may know the charge of their heavenly Father, and will not! which do know his charge, and will not keep it! Affectation of ignorance, and willing disobedience, is desperate.

Death was too hard a censure for such an unknown offence. The cruel piety of Saul will revenge the breach of his own charge, so as he would be loath God should avenge on himself the breach of his divine command. If Jonathan had not found better friends than his father, so noble a victory had been recompensed with death. He, that saved Israel from the Philistines, is saved by Israel from the hand of his father. Saul hath sworn Jonathan's death; the people, contrarily, swear his preservation: his kingdom was not so absolute, that he could run away with so unmerciful a justice; their oath, that savoured of disobedience, prevailed against his oath, that savoured too strong of cruelty. Neither doubt I, but Saul was secretly not displeased with this loving resistance;

so long as his heart was not false to his oath, he could not be sorry that Jonathan should live.

BOOK XIII.

CONTEMPLATION I.—SAUL AND AGAG.

GOD holds it no derogation from his mercy to bear a quarrel long, where he hates. He, whose anger to the vessels of wrath is everlasting, even in temporal judgment, revengeth late. The sins of his own children are no sooner done, and repented of, than forgotten; but the malicious sins of his enemies stick fast in an infinite displeasure. "I remember what Amelek did to Israel, how they laid wait for them by the way, as they came up from Egypt." Alas, Lord! (might Amalek say) they were our forefathers, we never knew their faces, no, not their names; the fact was so far from our consent, that it is almost past the memory of our histories. It is not in the power of time to raze out any of the arrearages of God. We may lay up wrath for our posterity. Happy is that child whose progenitors are in heaven, he is left an inheritor of blessing together with estate, whereas wicked ancestors lose the thank of a rich patrimony, by the curse that attends it. He that thinks, because punishment is deferred, that God hath forgiven or forgot his offence, is unacquainted with justice, and knows not that time makes no difference in eternity.

The Amalekites were wicked idolaters, and therefore could not want many present sins, which deserved their extirpation. That God, which had taken notice of all their offences, picks out this one noted sin of their forefathers for revenge: amongst all their indignities, this shall bear the name of their judgment. As in legal proceedings with malefactors, one indictment found gives the style of their condemnation. In the lives of those which are notoriously wicked, God cannot look besides a sin; yet when he draws to an execution, he fastens his sentence upon one evil, as principal, others as accessories, so as, at the last, one sin, which perhaps we make no account of, shall pay for all.

The paganish idolatries of the Amalekites could not but be greater sins to God, than their hard measure to Israel; yet God sets this upon the file, while the rest are not recorded: their superstitions might be of ignorance, this sin was of malice. Malicious wickedness, of all others, as they are in greatest opposition to the goodness and mercy of God, shall be sure of the payment of greatest vengeance. The detestation of God may be measured by his revenge; "Slay both man and woman, both infant and suckling, both ox and sheep, camel and ass;" not themselves only, but every thing that drew life, either from them or for their use, must die. When the God of mercy speaks such bloody words, the provocation must needs be vehement. Sins of infirmity do but mutter; spiteful sins cry loud for judgment in the ears of God. Prepensed malice, in courts of human justice, aggravates the murder, and sharpens the sentence of death.

What then was this sin of Amalek, that is called unto this late reckoning? What, but their envious and unprovoked onsets upon the back of Israel; this was it that God took so to heart, as that he not only remembers it now by Samuel, but he bids Israel ever to remember it, by Moses; "Remember how Amalek met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of you, all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary." Besides this, did Amalek meet Israel in a pitched battle openly, in Rephidim; for that God payed them in the present. The hand of Moses, lifted up on the hill, slew them in the valley. He therefore repeats not that quarrel; but the cowardly and cruel attempts upon an impotent enemy, stick still in the stomach of the Almighty. Oppression and wrong, upon even terms, are not so heinous unto God, as those that are upon manifest disadvantage: in the one, there is a hazard of return; in the other, there is ever a tyrannous insultation. God takes still the weaker part, and will be sure therefore to plague them which seek to put injuries on the unable to resist.

This sin of Amalek slept all the time of the judges; those governors were only for rescue and defence; now so soon as Israel hath a king, and that king is settled in peace, God gives charge to call them to account; it was that which God had both threatened and sworn, and now he chooses out a fit season for the execution. As we use to say of winter, the judgments of God do never rot in the sky, but shall fall, if late, yet surely, yet seasonably. There is small comfort in the delay of vengeance, while we are sure it shall lose nothing in the way by length of protraction.

The Kenites were the offspring of Hobad or Jethro, father-in-law to Moses; the affinity of him, to whom Israel owed their deliverance and being, was worthy of respect; but it was the mercy of that good and wise Midianite showed unto Israel in the wilderness, by his grave advice, cheerful gratulation and aid, which won this grateful forbearance of his posterity. He that is not less in mercy than in justice, as he challenged Amalek's sin of their succeeding generations, so he derives the recompense of Jethro's kindness unto his far descended issue. Those that were unborn many ages after Jethro's death, receive life from his dust, and favour from his hospitality: the name of their dead grandfather saves them from the common destruction of their neighbours.. The services of our love to God's children are never thankless. When we are dead and rotten, they shall live, and procure blessings to those, which never knew, perhaps, nor heard of their progenitors. If we sow good works, succession shall reap them, and we shall be happy in making them so.

The Kenites dwelt in the borders of Amalek, but in tents, as did their issue the Rechabites, so as they might remove with ease. They are warned to shift their habitations, lest they should perish with ill neighbours. It is the manner of God, first to separate before he judge, as a good husbandman weeds his corn ere it be ripe for the sickle, and goes to the fan ere he go to the fire. When the Kenites pack up their fardels, it is time to expect judgment. Why should not we imitate God, and separate ourselves, that we may not be judged? separate not one Kenite from another, but every Kenite from among the Amalekites; else, if we must needs live with Amalek, we cannot think much to die with him.

The Kenites are no sooner removed, than Saul falls upon the Amalekites; he destroys all the people, but spares their king. The charge of God was universal, for man and beast. In the corruption of partiality, lightly the greatest escape. Covetousness or misaffection are commonly guilty of the impunity of those, which are at once more eminent in dignity and in offence. It is a shameful hypocrisy, to make our commodity the measure and rule of our execution of God's command, and under pretence of godliness, to intend gain. The unprofitable vulgar must die: Agag may yield a rich ransom. The lean and feeble cattle, that would but spend stover, and die alone, shall perish by the sword of Israel; the best may stock the grounds, and furnish the markets. O hypocrites! did God send you for gain, or for revenge? Went you to be purveyors, or executioners? If you plead that all those wealthy herds had been but lost in a speedy death, think ye that he knew not this which commanded it? Can that be lost, which is devoted to the will of the Owner and Creator? or can ye think to gain any thing by disobedience? That man can never either do well, or fare well, which thinks there can be more profit in any thing, than in his obedience to his Maker. Because Saul spared the best of the men, the people spared the best of the cattle; each is willing to favour the other in the sin. The sins of the great command imitation, and do as seldom go without attendants as their persons.

Saul knew well how much he had done amiss, and yet dare meet Samuel, and can say, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have fulfilled the commandment of the Lord." His heart knew that his tongue was as false as his hands had been; and if his heart had not been more false than either of them, neither of them had been so gross in their falsehood. If hypocrisy were not either foolish or impudent, she durst not show her head to a seer of God. Could Saul think that Samuel knew of the asses that were lost, and did not know of the oxen and sheep that were spared? Could he foretell his thoughts, when it was, and now not know of his open actions? Much less, when we have to do with God himself, should dissimulation presume either of safety or secrecy. Can the God, that made the heart, not know it? Can He, that comprehends all things, be shut out of our close corners? Saul was otherwise crafty enough, yet herein his simplicity is palpable. Sin can besot even the wisest man; and there was never but folly in wickedness.

No man brags so much of holiness as he that wants it. True obedience is joined ever with humility, and fear of unknown errors. Falsehood is bold, and can say, "I have fulfilled the commandment of the Lord." If Saul had been truly obsequious and holy, he had made no noise of it. A gracious heart is not a blab of his tongue, but rests and rejoiceth silently in the conscience of a secret goodness. Those vessels yield most sound, that have the least liquour. Samuel had reason to believe the sheep and oxen above Saul; their bleating and lowing was a sufficient conviction of a denied and outfaced disobedience. God opened their mouths to accuse Saul of their life, and his falsehood: but as sin is crafty, and never wanted a cloak wherewith both to hide and deck itself, even this very rebellion is holy. First, the act, if it were evil, was not mine, but the people's. And, secondly, their intention makes it good; for these flocks and herds were preserved, not for gain, but for devotion. What needs this quarrel? If any gain by this act, it is the Lord thy God; his altars shall smoke with these sacrifices; ye, that serve at them, shall fare so much the better. This godly thriftiness looks for thanks rather than censure. If Saul had been in Samuel's clothes, perhaps this answer would have satisfied him; surely himself stands out in it, as that whereto he dares trust; and after he hears of God's angry reproof, he avows, and doubles his hold of his innocency; as if the commanders should not answer for the known sins of the people; as if our intentions could justify us to God, against God. How much ado is it to bring sinners upon their knees, and to make their tongues accuse their hands! But there is no halting with the Maker of the heart; he knew it was covetousness, and not piety, which was accessory to this forbearance; and if it had been as was pretended, he knew it was an odious impiety to raise devotion out of disobedience. Saul shall hear and find, that he hath dealt no less wickedly in sparing an Agag, than in killing an innocent Israelite; in sparing these beasts for sacrifice, than in sacrificing beasts that had been unclean. Why was sacrifice itself good, but because it was commanded? What difference was there betwixt slaughter and sacrifice, but obedience? To sacrifice disobediently, is wilfully to mock God in honouring him.

CONTEMPLATION II.—THE REJECTION OF SAUL AND CHOICE OF DAVID.

EVEN when Saul had abandoned God in disobedience, he would not forego Samuel, yea, though he reproved him; when he had forsaken the substance, yet he would maintain the formality. If he cannot hold the man, he will keep the pledge of his garment; such was the violence of Saul's desire, that he will rather rend Samuel's coat, than part with his person. Little did Saul think, that he had in his hand the pawn of his own rejection; that this act of kind importunity should carry in it a presage of his judgment; yet so it did. This very rending of the coat was a real prophecy, and did bode no less than the rending of the kingdom from him and his posterity. Wicked men, while they think by carnal means to make their peace, plunge themselves deeper into misery.

Any stander-by would have said, What a good king is this! How dear is God's prophet unto him! How happy is Israel in such a prince, as thus loves the messengers of God! Samuel, that saw the bottom of his hollow affection, rejects him whom God hath rejected. He was taught to look upon Saul, not as a king, but as an offender, and therefore refuses with no less vehemency than Saul intreated. It was one thing, what he might do as a subject; another, what he must do as a prophet. Now he knows not Saul any otherwise, than as so much the greater trespasser as his place was higher; and therefore he doth no more spare his greatness, than the God against whom he sinned; neither doth he countenance that man with his presence, on whom he sees God to frown.

There needs no other character of hypocrisy, than Saul, in the carriage of this one business with Agag and Samuel: first he obeys God, where there is no gain in disobedience; then he serves God by halves, and disobeys where the obedience might be loss. He gives God of the worst; he doth that in a colour, which might seem answerable to the charge of God; he respects persons in the execution; he gives good words when his deeds were evil; he protests his obedience against his conscience; he faces out his protestation against a reproof; when he sees no remedy, he acknowledges the fact, denies the sin, yea, he justifies the act by a profitable intention; when he can no longer maintain his innocence, he casts the blame from himself, upon the people. He confesseth not, till the sin be wrung from his mouth: he seeks his peace out of himself, and relies more upon another's virtue than his own penitency; he would cloak his guiltiness with the holiness of another's presence; he is more tormented with the danger and damage of his sin, than with the offence; he cares to hold in with men, in what terms soever he stands with God; he fashionably serves that God, whom he hath not cared to reconcile by his repentance. No marvel if God cast him off, whose best was dissimulation.

Old Samuel is forced to do a double execution, and that upon no less than two kings: the one upon Saul, in dividing the kingdom from him, who had divided himself from God: the other upon Agag, in dividing him in pieces, whom Saul should have divided. Those holy hands were not used to such sacrifices; yet did he never spill blood more acceptably. If Saul had been truly penitent, he had, in a desire of satisfaction, prevented the hand of Samuel in this slaughter: now he coldly stands still, and suffers the weak hands of an aged prophet to be imbrued with that blood, which he was commanded to shed. If Saul might not sacrifice in the absence of Samuel, yet Samuel might kill in the presence of Saul. He was yet a judge of Israel, although he suspended the execution: in Saul's neglect, this charge reverted to him. God loves just executions so well, that he will hardly take them ill at any hand.

I do not find that the slaughter of Agag troubled Samuel; that other act of his severity upon Saul, though it drew no blood, yet struck him in the striking, and fetched tears from his eyes. Good Samuel mourned for him, that had not grace to mourn for himself. No man in all Israel might seem to have so much reason to rejoice in Saul's ruin as Samuel, since that he knew him raised up in despite of his government; yet he mourns more for him than he did for his sons, for himself. It grieved him to see the plant, which he had set in the garden of Israel, thus soon withered. It is an unnatural senselessness not to be affected with the dangers, with the sins of our governors. God did not blame this sorrow, but moderated it; "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?" It was not the affection he forbade, but the measure. In this is the difference betwixt good men and evil, that evil men mourn not for their own sins; good men do so mourn for the sins of others, that they will hardly be taken off.

If Samuel mourn because Saul hath cast away God by his sin, he must cease to mourn, because God hath cast away Saul from reigning over Israel in his just punishment. A good heart hath learned to rest itself upon the justice of God's decree, and forgets all earthly respects, when it looks up to heaven. So did God mean to show his displeasure against the person of Saul, that he would show favour to Israel; he will not therefore bereave them of a king, but change him for a better. Either Saul had slandered his people, or else they were partners with him in the disobedience; yet, because it was their ruler's fault that they were not overruled, we do not hear of their smarting any otherwise than in the subjection to such a king as was not loyal to God. The loss of Saul is their gain; the government of their first king was abortive, no marvel if it held not. Now was the maturity of that state; and therefore God will bring them forth a kindly monarchy, settled where it should. Kings are of God's providing. It is good reason he should make choice of his own deputies; but where goodness meets with sovereignty, both his right and his gift are doubled. If kings were merely from the earth, what needs a prophet to be seen in the choice, or inauguration? The hand of Samuel doth not now bear the sceptre to rule Israel, but it bears the horn for the anointing of him that must rule. Saul was sent to him, when the time was, to be anointed; but now he is sent to anoint David. Then Israel sought a king for themselves, now God seeks a king for Israel. The prophet is therefore directed to the house of Jesse the Bethlehemite, the grandchild of Ruth; now is the faithful love of that good Moabitess crowned with the honour of a kingdom, in the succeeding generation. God fetched her out of Moab, to bring a king unto Israel. While Orpah wants bread in her own country, Ruth is grown a great lady in Bethlehem, and is advanced to be great grandmother to the king of Israel. The retributions of God are bountiful; never any man forsook ought for his sake, and complained of a hard bargain.

Even the best of God's saints want not their infirmities. He, that never replied when he was sent to reprove the king, moveth doubts, when he is bidden to go and anoint his successor. "How can I go? If Saul hear it, he will kill me." Perhaps desire of full direction drew from him this question, but not without a mixture of diffidence; for the manner of doing it doth not so much trouble him, as the success. It is not to be expected, that the most faithful hearts should be always in an equal height of resolution: God doth not chide Samuel, but instruct him. He, which is wisdom itself, teacheth him to hide his counsels in an honest policy: "Take an heifer with thee, and say, I come to do sacrifice to the Lord." This was to say true, not to say all. Truth may not be crossed by denials or equivocations, it may be concealed in a discreet silence. Except in the case of an oath, no man is bound to speak all he knows. We are not only allowed, but commanded to be innocently serpentine. There were, doubtless, heifers enough in Bethlehem; Jesse had both wealth and devotion enough, to have bestowed a sacrifice upon God, and his prophet. But to give a more perfect colour to his intention, Samuel must take a heifer with him: the act itself was serious and necessary. There was no place, no time, wherein it was not fit for a Samuel to offer peace-offerings unto God; but when a king should be anointed, there was no less than necessity in this service. Those, which must represent God to the world, ought to be consecrated to that Majesty whom they resemble, by public devotions. Every important action requires a sacrifice to bless it, much more that act which imports the whole church or commonwealth.

It was great news to see Samuel at Bethlehem; he was no gadder abroad, none but necessary occasions could make him stir from Ramath. The elders of the city therefore welcome him with trembling; not for that they were afraid of him, but of themselves; they knew that guest would not come to them for familiarity: straight do they suspect it was the purpose of some judgment that drew him thither. "Comest thou peaceably?" It is a good thing to stand in awe of God's messengers, and to hold good terms with them, upon all occasions. The Bethlehemites are glad to hear of no other errand, but a sacrifice; and now must they sanctify themselves for so sacred a business. We may not presume to sacrifice unto God unsanctified; this were to mar an holy act, and make ourselves more profane, by profaning that which should be holy.

All the citizens sanctify themselves, but Jesse and his sons were in a special fashion sanctified by Samuel. This business was most theirs, and all Israel in them; the more God hath to do with us, the more holy should we be. With what desire did Samuel look upon the sons of Jesse, that he might see the face of the man whom God had chosen! And now, when Eliab the eldest son came forth, a man of a goodly presence, whose person seemed fit to succeed Saul, he thinks with himself, This choice is soon made, I have already espied the head on which I must spend this holy oil; this is the man which hath both the privilege of nature in his primogeniture, and of outward goodliness in proportion; surely the Lord's anointed is before me. Even the holiest prophet, when he goes without God, runs into error; the best judgment is subject to deceit; it is no trusting to any mortal man, when he speaks of himself. Our eyes can be led by nothing but signs and appearances, and those have commonly in them either a true falsehood, or uncertain truth.

That which would have forewarned Samuel, deceived him; he had seen the proof of a goodly stature unanswerable to their hopes, and yet his eye errs in the shape. He that judgeth by the inside both of our hearts and actions, checks Samuel in his misconceit; "Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature, because I have refused him; for God seeth not as man seeth." The king with whom God meant to satisfy the untimely desires of Israel, was chosen by his stature: but the king with whom God meant to please himself, is chosen by the heart. All the seven sons of Jesse are presented to the prophet; no one is omitted whom their father thought capable of any respect. If either Samuel or Jesse should have chosen, David should never have been king. His father thought him fit to keep sheep, his brethren fit to rule men; yet even David, the youngest son, is fetched from the fold, and, by the choice of God, destined to the throne. Nature, which is commonly partial to her own, could not suggest ought to Jesse, to make him think David worthy to be remembered in any competition of honour; yet him hath God singled out to rule.

God will have his wisdom magnified in the unlikelihoods of his election. David's countenance was ingenuous and beautiful; but if it had promised so much as Eliab's, or Aminadab's, he had not been in the fields while his brethren were at the sacrifice. If we do altogether follow our eye, and suffer ourselves to be guided by outward respects in our choice, for God or ourselves, we cannot but go amiss. What do we think the brethren of David thought, when they saw the oil poured upon his head? Surely, as they were envious enough, they had too much repined, if they had either fully apprehended the purpose of the prophet, or else had not thought of some improbability in the success; either they understood not, or believed not, what God would do with their brother; they saw him graced with God's Spirit above his wont, but perhaps foresaw not whither it tended. David, as no whit changed in his condition, returns to his sheep again, and, with an humble admiration of God's gracious respect to him, casts himself upon the wise and holy decree of the Almighty, resigning himself to the disposition of those hands which had chosen him; when suddenly a messenger is sent from Saul, to call him in all haste to that court whereof he shall once be master. The occasion is no less from God than the event.

CONTEMPLATION III.—DAVID CALLED TO THE COURT.

THAT the kingdom is, in the appointment of God, departed from Saul, it is his least loss; now the Spirit of God is also departed from him: one spirit is no sooner gone, but another is come: both are from God. Even the worst spirits have not only permission, but commission from heaven for the infliction of judgment. He, that at first could hide himself among the stuff, that he might not be king, is now so transported with this glory, that he grows passionate with the thought of foregoing it. Satan takes advantage of his melancholy dejection, and turns this passion into frenzy. God will have even evil spirits work by means; a distempered body, and an unquiet mind, are fit grounds for Satan's vexation. Saul's courtiers, as men that were more witty than religious, advise him to music: they knew the strength of that skill in allaying the fury of passions, in cheering up the dejected spirits of their master. This was done like some fond chirurgeon, that, when the bone is out of joint, lays some suppling poultices to the part, for the assuaging of the ache, in the meantime not caring to remedy the luxation.

If they had said, Sir, you know this evil comes from that God whom you have offended, there can be no hope but in reconcilement; how easy is it for the God of spirits to take off Satan! labour your peace with him by a serious humiliation; make means to Samuel to further the atonement; they had been wise counsellors, divine physicians; whereas now, they do but skin over the sore, and leave it rankled at the bottom. The cure must ever proceed in the same steps with the disease, else in vain shall we seem to heal; there is no safety in the redress of evils, but to strike at the root. Yet, since it is no better with Saul and his courtiers, it is well it is no worse: I do not hear either the master or servants say, This is an ill spirit, send for some magician that may countermand him: there are forcible enchantments for these spiritual vexations; if Samuel will not, there are witches that may give ease. But as one that would rather be ill than do worse, he contents himself to do that which was lawful, if unsufficient. It is a shame to say, that he, whom God had rejected for his sin, was yet a saint to some that should be Christians, who care not how much they are beholden to the devil in their distresses, affecting to cast out devils by Beelzebub. In cases of loss, or sickness, they make hell their refuge, and seek for patronage from an enemy. Here is a fearful agreement; Satan seeks to them in his temptations; they, in their consultations, seek to him: and now that they have mutually found each other, if ever they part it is a miracle.

David had lived obscurely in his father's house, his only care and ambition was the welfare of the flock he tended; and now, while his father and his brothers neglected him, as fit for nothing but the field, he is talked of at the court. Some of Saul's followers had been at Jesse's house, and taken notice of David's skill; and now that harp, which he practised for his private recreation, shall make him of a shepherd a courtier. The music that he meant only to himself and his sheep, brings him before kings. The wisdom of God thought fit to take this occasion of acquainting David with that court which he shall once govern. It is good that education should perfect our children in all those commendable qualities whereto they are disposed. Little do we know, what use God means to make of those faculties, which we know not how to employ. Where the Almighty purposes an advancement, obscurity can be no prejudice; small means shall set forward that which God hath decreed.

Doubtless, old Jesse noted, not without admiration, the wonderful accordance of God's proceedings, that he, which was sent for out of the field to be anointed, should now be sent for out of the country into the court; and now he perceived, God was making way for the execution of that which he purposed; he attends the issue in silence, neither shall his hand fail to give furtherance to the project of God: he therefore sends his son laden with a present to Saul. The same God which called David to the court, welcomes him thither: his comeliness, valour, and skill, have soon won him favour in the eyes of Saul. The Giver of all graces hath so placed his favours, that the greatest enemies of goodness shall see somewhat in the holiest men, which they shall affect, and for which they shall honour the persons of them whose virtues they dislike; as, contrarily, the saints on earth see somewhat to love even in the worst creatures.

No doubt David sung to his harp; his harp was not more sweet than his song was holy. Those psalms alone had been more powerful to chase the evil spirit, than the music was to calm passions; both together gave ease to Saul: and God gave this effect to both because he would have Saul train up his successor. This sacred music did not more dispel Satan, than wanton music invites him, and more cheers him than us. He plays and dances at a filthy song, he sings at an obscene dance. Our sin is his best pastime; whereas psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, are torment unto the tempter, and music to the angels in heaven, whose trade is to sing Hallelujahs in the choir of glory.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—DAVID AND GOLIAH.

AFTER the news of the Philistines' army, I hear no more mention of Saul's frenzy; whether the noise of war diverted those thoughtful passions, or whether God, for his people's sake, took off that evil spirit, lest Israel might miscarry under a frantic governor. Now David hath leisure to return to Bethlehem: the glory of the court cannot transport him to ambitious vanity; he had rather be his father's shepherd than Saul's armour-bearer. All the magnificence and state which he saw, could not put his mouth out of the taste of retired simplicity; yea, rather, he loves his hook the better, since he saw the court; and now his brethren serve Saul in his stead. A good heart hath learned to frame itself unto all conditions, and can change estates without change of disposition, rising and falling according to occasion. The worldly mind can rise easily, but, when it is once up, knows not how to descend either with patience or safety.

Forty days together had the Philistines and Israelites faced each other; they pitched on two hills, one in the sight of other, nothing but a valley was betwixt them. Both stand upon defence and advantage: if they had not meaned to fight, they had never drawn so near; and if they had been eager of fight, a valley could not have parted them. Actions of hazard require deliberation; not fury, but discretion must be the guide of war.

So had Joshua destroyed the giantly Anakims out of the land of Israel, that yet some were left in Azzah, Gath, and Ashdod; both to show Israel what adversaries their forefathers found in Canaan, and whom they mastered; as also, that God might win glory to himself by these subsequent executions. Of that race was Goliah, whose heart was as high as his head, his strength was answerable to his stature, his weapons answerable to his strength, his pride exceeded all: because he saw his head higher, his arms stronger, his sword and spear bigger, his shield heavier than any Israelite's, he defies the whole host; and, walking between the two armies, braves all Israel with a challenge; "Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and you servants to Saul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. Give me a man, that we may fight together." Carnal hearts are carried away with presumption of their own abilities, and, not finding matches to themselves in outward appearance, insult over the impotency of inferiors, and as those that can see no invisible opposition, promise themselves certainty of success. Insolence and self-confidence argues the heart to be nothing but a lump of proud flesh.

The first challenge of a duel, that ever we find, came out of the mouth of an uncircumcised Philistine; yet was that in open war, and tended to the saving of many lives, by adventuring one or two; and whosoever imitateth, nay, surpasseth him in challenge to private duels, in the attempt partaketh of his uncircumcision, though he should overcome, and of his manner of punishment, if in such private combats he cast away his life. For of all such desperate prodigals we may say, that their heads are cut off by their own sword, if not by their own hand. We cannot challenge men, and not challenge God, who justly challengeth to himself both to take vengeance and to give success. The more Goliah challenges, and is unanswered, the more is he puffed up in the pride of his own power. And is there none of all Israel that will answer this champion otherwise than with his heels? Where is the courage of him that was higher than all Israel from the shoulders upward? The time was, when Nahash the Ammonite had made that tyrannous demand of the right eyes of the Gileadites, that Saul could say, unasked, "What aileth the people to weep?" and could hew his oxen in pieces to raise the spirits of Israel; and now he stands still, and sees the host turn their back, and never so much as asks, What aileth the people to flee? The time was, when Saul slew forty thousand Philistines in one day, and perhaps Goliah was in that discomfiture, and now one Philistine is suffered by him to brave all Israel forty days; whence is this difference? The spirit of fortitude was now departed from him. Saul was not more above himself when God was with him, than he is below others now that he is left of God. Valour is not merely of nature; nature is ever like itself: by this rule, he that is once valiant should never turn coward. But now we see the greatest spirits inconstant, and those, which have given good proofs of magnanimity at other times, have bewrayed white livers unto their own reproach. He, that is the God of hosts, gives and takes away men's hearts at his pleasure. Neither is it otherwise in our spiritual combats; sometimes the same soul dare challenge all the powers of darkness, which otherwhiles gives ground to a temptation. We have no strength but what is given us; and if the Author of all good gifts remit his hand for our humiliation, either we fight not, or are foiled.

David hath now lain long enough close among his flock in the fields of Bethlehem; God sees a time to send him to the pitched field of Israel. Good old Jesse, that was doubtless joyful to think that he had afforded three sons to the wars of his king, is no less careful of their welfare and provision; and who, amongst all the rest of his seven sons, shall be picked out for this service, but his youngest son David, whose former and almost worn-out acquaintance in court, and employment under Saul, seemed to fit him best for this errand. Early in the morning is David upon his way, yet not so early as to leave his flock unprovided. If his father's command dismiss him, yet will he stay till he have trusted his sheep with a careful keeper. We cannot be faithful shepherds, if our spiritual charge be less dear unto us; if, when necessity calls us from our flocks, we depute not those who are vigilant and conscionable.

Ere David's speed can bring him to the valley of Elah, both the armies are on foot ready to join: he takes not this excuse to stay without, as a man daunted with the horror of war; but, leaving his present with his servant, he thrusts himself into the thickest of the host, and salutes his brethren, who were now thinking of killing or dying. When the proud champion of the Philistines comes stalking forth before all the troops, and renews this insolent challenge against Israel, David sees the man, and hears his defiance, and looks about him, to see what answer would be given; and when he spies nothing but pale faces, and backs turned, he wonders, not so much, that one man should dare all Israel, as that all Israel should run from one man. Even when they fly from Goliah, they talk of the reward, that should be given to that encounter and victory, which they dare not undertake; so those, who have not grace to believe, can yet say, There is glory laid up for the faithful. Ever since his anointing, was David possessed of God's Spirit, and thereby filled both with courage and wisdom: the more strange doth it seem to him, that all Israel should be thus dastardly. Those, that are themselves eminent in any grace, cannot but wonder at the miserable defects of others: and the more shame they see in others' imperfections, the more is their zeal in avoiding those errors in themselves.

While base hearts are moved by example, the want of example is encouragement enough for an heroical mind; therefore is David ready to undertake the quarrel, because no man else dare do it. His eyes sparkled with holy anger, and his heart rose up to his mouth, when he heard this proud challenge: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should revile the host of the living God?" Even so, O Saviour, when all the generations of men run away affrighted from the powers of death and darkness, thou alone hast undertaken, and confounded them!

Who should offer to daunt the holy courage of David, but his own brethren? The envious heart of Eliab construes this forwardness as his own disgrace. Shall I, thinks he, be put down by this puisne? shall my father's youngest son dare to attempt that, which my stomach will not serve me to adventure? Now, therefore, he rates David for his presumption; and instead of answering to the recompense of the victory, which others were ready to give, he recompenseth the very inquiry of David with a check. It was for his brethren's sake that David came thither; and yet his very journey is cast upon him, by them, for a reproach; "Wherefore camest thou down hither?" and, when their bitterness can meet with nothing else to shame him, his sheep are cast in his teeth. Is it for thee, an idle proud boy, to be meddling with our martial matters? Doth not yonder champion look as if he were a fit match for thee? What makest thou of thyself? or what dost thou think of us? I think it were fitter for thee to be looking to thy sheep, than looking at Goliah. The wilderness would become thee better than the field. Wherein art thou equal to any man thou seest, but in arrogancy and presumption? The pastures of Bethlehem could not hold thee; but thou thoughtest it a goodly matter to see the wars. I know thee, as if I were in thy bosom: this was thy thought, There is no glory to be got among fleeces, I will go seek it in arms: now are my brethren winning honour in the troops of Israel, while I am basely tending on sheep; why should not I be as forward as the best of them? This vanity would make thee straight of a shepherd a soldier, and of a soldier a champion. Get thee home, foolish stripling, to thy hook and thy harp; let swords and spears alone to those that know how to use them.

It is quarrel enough, amongst many, to a good action, that it is not their own. There is no enemy so ready, or so spiteful, as the domestical. The hatred of brethren is so much more, as their blood is nearer. The malice of strangers is simple, but of a brother is mixt with envy. The more unnatural any quality is, the more extreme it is: a cold wind rom the south is intolerable. David's first victory is of himself, next of his brother. He overcomes himself, in a patient forbearance of his brother; he overcomes the malicious rage of his brother, with the mildness of his answer. If David had wanted spirit, he had not been troubled with the insultation of a Philistine. If he had a spirit to match Goliah, how doth he so calmly receive the affront of a brother? "What have I now done? is there not a cause?" That which would have stirred the choler of another, allayeth his. It was a brother that wronged him, and that his eldest. Neither was it time to quarrel with a brother, while the Philistines' swords were drawn, and Goliah was challenging. O that these two motives could induce us to peace! If we have injury in our person, in our cause, it is from brethren, and the Philistines look on: I am deceived, if this conquest were less glorious than the following; he is fit to be God's champion, that hath learned to be victor of himself.

It is not this sprinkling of cold water that can quench the fire of David's zeal, but still his courage sends up flames of desire, still he goes on to inquire, and to proffer. He, whom the regard of others' envy can dismay, shall never do ought worthy of envy. Never man undertook any exploit of worth, and received not some discouragement in the way. This courageous motion of David was not more scorned by his brother, than by the other Israelites applauded. The rumour flies to the ears of the king, that there is a young man desirous to encounter the giant. David is brought forth. Saul, when he heard of a champion that durst go into the lists with Goliah, looked for one as much higher than himself, as he was taller than the rest: he expected some stern face, and brawny arm; young and ruddy David is so far below his thoughts, that he receives rather contempt than thanks. His words were stout, his person was weak. Saul doth not more like his resolution, than distrust his ability: "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine, to fight with him; for thou art a boy, and he is a man of war from his youth." Even Saul seconds Eliab in the conceit of this disparity; and if Eliab spake out of envy, Saul speaks out of judgment; both judge, as they were judged of, by the stature. All this cannot weaken that heart, which receives his strength from faith. David's greatest conflict is with his friends; the overcoming of their dissuasions, that he might fight, was more work than to overcome his enemy in fighting. He must first justify his strength to Saul, ere he may prove it upon Goliah. Valour is never made good but by trial. He pleads the trial of his puissance upon the bear and the lion that he may have leave to prove it upon a worse beast than they: "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, therefore this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them." Experience of good success is no small comfort to the heart; this gives possibility and hope, but no certainty. Two things there were on which David built his confidence, on Goliah's sin, and God's deliverance; "Seeing he hath railed on the host of the living God: the Lord, that delivered me out of the paws of the lion and the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." Well did David know, that if this Philistine's skin had been as hard as the brass of his shield, his sin would make it penetrable by every stroke. After all brags of manhood, he is impotent that hath provoked God. While others labour for outward fornication, happy and safe were we, if we could labour for innocence. He that hath found God present in one extremity, may trust him in the next. Every sensible favour of the Almighty invites both his gifts and our trust.

Resolution, thus grounded, makes even Saul himself confident; David shall have both his leave and his blessing. If David came to Saul as a shepherd, he shall go toward Goliah as a warrior. The attire of the king is not too rich for him that shall fight for his king and country. Little did Saul think, that his helmet was now on that head, which should once wear his crown. Now, that David was arrayed in the warlike habit of a king, and girded with his sword, he looked upon himself, and thought this outside glorious: but when he offered to walk, and found that the attire was not so strong as unwieldy, and that it might be more for show than use, he lays down these accoutrements of honour, and, as caring rather to be a homely victor, than a glorious spoil, he craves pardon to go in no clothes but his own; he takes his staff, instead of the spear, his shepherd's scrip instead of his brigandine, and instead of his sword he takes his sling, and instead of darts and javelins, he takes five smooth stones out of the brook. Let Saul's coat be never so rich, and his armour never so strong, what is David the better, if they fit him not? It is not to be inquired, how excellent any thing is, but how proper. Those things which are helps to some, may be encumbrances to others. An unmeet good may be as inconvenient as an accustomed evil. If we could wish another man's honour, when we feel the weight of his cares we should be glad to be in our own coat.

Those that depend upon the strength of faith, though they neglect not means, yet they are not curious in the proportion of outward means to the effect desired. Where the heart is armed with an assured confidence, a sling and a stone are weapons enough; to the unbelieving no helps are sufficient. Goliah, though he were presumptuous enough, yet had one shield carried before him, another he carried on his shoulder; neither will his sword alone content him, but be takes his spear too. David's armour is his plain shepherd's russet, and the brook yields him his artillery; and he knows there is more safety in his cloth, than the other's brass; and more danger in his pebbles, than in the other's spear. Faith gives both heart and arms. The inward minution is so much more noble, because it is of proof for both soul and body: if we be furnished with this, how boldly shall we meet with the powers of darkness, and go away more than conquerors!

Neither did the quality of David's weapons bewray more confidence than the number. If he will put his life and victory upon the stones of the brook, why doth he not fill his scrip full of them? Why will he content himself with five? Had he been furnished with store, the advantage of his nimbleness might have given him hope; if one fail, that yet another might speed: but now this paucity puts the despatch to a sudden hazard, and he hath but five stones-cast either to death or victory: still the fewer helps the stronger faith. David had an instinct from God that he should overcome; he had not a particular direction how he should overcome. For had he been at first resolved upon the sling and stone, he had saved the labour of girding his sword. It seems while they were addressing him to the combat, he made account of hand blows; now he is purposed rather to send, than bring death to his adversary: in either, or both, he durst trust God with the success, and beforehand (through the conflict) saw the victory: it is sufficient, that we know the issue of our fight. If our weapons and wards vary, according to the occasion given by God, that is nothing to the event; sure we are, that if we resist, we shall overcome; and if we overcome, we shall be crowned.

When David appeared in the lists to so unequal an adversary, as many eyes were upon him, so in those eyes diverse affections. The Israelites looked upon him with pity and fear, and each man thought, Alas! why is this comely stripling suffered to cast away himself upon such a monster? Why will they let him go unarmed to such an affray? Why will Saul hazard the honour of Israel on so unlikely a head? The Philistines, especially their great champion, looked upon him with scorn, disdaining so base a combatant; "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?" What could be said more fitly? Hadst thou been any other than a dog, O Goliah, thou hadst never opened thy foul mouth to bark against the host of God, and the God of hosts. If David had thought thee any other than a very dog, he had never come to thee with a staff and a stone.

The last words that ever the Philistine shall speak, are curses and brags; "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field." Seldom ever was there a good end of ostentation. Presumption is at once the presage and cause of ruin. He is a weak adversary that can be killed with words. That man which could not fear the giant's hand, cannot fear his tongue. If words shall first encounter, the Philistine receives the first foil, and shall first let in death unto his ear, ere it enter into his forehead. "Thou comest to me with a sword, and a spear, and a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the host of Israel, whom thou hast railed upon. This day shall the Lord close thee in my hand, and I shall smite thee, and take thine head from thee." Here is another style, not of a boaster, but of a prophet. Now shall Goliah know whence to expect his bane, even from the hands of a revenging God, that shall smite him by David, and now shall learn, too late, what it is to meddle with an enemy that goes under the invisible protection of the Almighty. No sooner hath David spoken, than his foot and hands second his tongue; he runs to fight with the Philistine. It is a cold courage that stands only upon defence; as a man that saw no cause of fear, and was full of the ambition of victory, he flies upon that monster, and, with a stone out of his bag, smites him in the forehead. There was no part of Goliah that was capable of that danger, but the face, and that piece of the face; the rest was defenced with a brazen wall, which a weak sling would have tried to batter in vain. What could Goliah fear, to see an adversary come to him without edge or point! And, behold, that one part hath God found out for the entrance of death. He, that could have caused the stone to pass through the shield and breast-plate of Goliah, rather directs the stone to that part whose nakedness gave advantage. Where there is power or possibility of nature, God uses not to work miracles, but chooses the way that lies most open to his purposes.

The vast forehead was a fair mark; but how easily might the sling have missed it, if there had not been another hand in this cast besides David's! He that guided David into this field, and raised his courage to this combat, guides the stone to his end, and lodges it in that seat of impudence. There now lieth the great defier of Israel, grovelling and grinning in death, and is not suffered to deal one blow for his life, and bites the unwelcome earth, for indignation that he dies by the hand of a shepherd! Earth and hell share him betwixt them. Such is the end of insolence and presumption. O God, what is flesh and blood to thee, who canst make a little pebble-stone stronger than a giant, and, when thou wilt, by the weakest means, canst strew thine enemies in the dust! Where now are the two shields of Goliah, that they did not bear off this stroke of death! or wherefore serves that weaver's beam, but to strike the earth in falling! or that sword, but to behead his master! What needed David load himself with an unnecessary weapon! one sword can serve both Goliah and him. If Goliah had a man to bear his shield, David had Goliah to bear his sword, wherewith that proud blasphemous head is severed from his shoulders. Nothing more honours God, than the turning of wicked men's forces against themselves. There are none of his enemies but carry with them their own destruction. Thus didst thou, O son of David, foil Satan with his own weapon, that whereby he meant destruction to thee and us, vanquished him through thy mighty power, and raised thee to that glorious triumph and super-exaltation wherein thou art, wherein we shall be with thee.

CONTEMPLATION V.—JONATHAN'S LOVE, AND SAUL'S ENVY.

Besides the discomfiture of the Philistines, David's victory had a double issue,—Jonathan's love, and Saul's envy, which God so mixed, that the one was a remedy of the other. A good son makes amends for a wayward father. How precious was that stone that killed such an enemy as Goliah, and purchased such a friend as Jonathan! All Saul's courtiers looked upon David: none so affected him, none did match him but Jonathan; that true correspondence, that was both in their faith and valour, hath knit their hearts. If David did set upon a bear, a lion, a giant; Jonathan had set upon a whole host and prevailed; the same spirit animated both; the same faith incited both; the same hand prospered both. All Israel was not worth this pair of friends, so zealously confident, so happily victorious. Similitude of dispositions and estates ties the fastest knots of affection. A wise soul hath piercing eyes, and hath quickly discerned the likeness of itself in another; as we do no sooner look into the glass of water, but face answers to face, and, where it sees a perfect resemblance of itself, cannot choose but love it with the same affection that it reflects upon itself.

No man saw David that day, which had so much cause to disaffect him; none in Israel should be a loser by David's success, but Jonathan. Saul was sure enough settled for his time, only his successor should forego all that which David should gain; so as none but David stands in Jonathan's light; and yet all this cannot abate one jot or dram of his love. Where God uniteth hearts, carnal respects are too weak to dissever them, since that, which breaks off affection, must needs be stronger than that which conjureth it.

Jonathan doth not desire to smother his love by concealment, but professes it in his carriage and actions; he puts off the robe that was upon him, and all his garments, even to his sword, and bow and girdle, and gives them unto his new friend. It was perhaps not without a mystery, that Saul's clothes fitted not David, but Jonathan's fitted him, and these he is as glad to wear, as he was to be disburdened of the other; that there might be a perfect resemblance, their bodies are suited as well as their hearts. Now the beholders can say, There goes Jonathan's other self; if there be another body under those clothes, there is the same soul. Now David hath cast off his russet coat, and his scrip, and is a shepherd no more; he is suddenly become both a courtier and a captain, and a companion to the prince; yet himself is not changed with his habit, with his condition; yea, rather, as if his wisdom had reserved itself for his exaltation, he so manageth a sudden greatness, as that he winneth all hearts. Honour shows the man; and if there be any blemishes of imperfection, they will be seen in the man that is unexpectedly lifted above his fellows: he is out of the danger of folly, whom a speedy advancement leaveth wise.

Jonathan loved David, the soldiers honoured him, the court favoured him, the people applauded him; only Saul stomached him, and therefore hated him, because he was so happy in all besides himself. It had been a shame for all Israel, if they had not magnified their champion. Saul's own heart could not but tell him, that they did owe the glory of that day, and the safety of himself and Israel, unto the sling of David, who, in one man, slew all those thousands at a blow. It was enough for the puissant king of Israel to follow the chase, and to kill them whom David had put to flight; yet he, that could lend his clothes and his armour to this exploit, cannot abide to part with the honour of it to him that had earned it so dearly. The holy songs of David had not more quieted his spirits before, than now the thankful song of the Israelitish women vexes him. One little ditty, of Saul "hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands," sung unto the timbrels of Israel, fetched again that evil spirit, which David's music had expelled. Saul needed not the torment of a worse spirit than envy. O the unreasonableness of this wicked passion! The women gave Saul more and David less, than he deserved; for Saul alone could not kill a thousand, and David, in that one act of killing Goliah, slew in effect all the Philistines that were slain that day; and yet, because they gave more to David than to himself, he that should have indited, and began that song of thankfulness, repines, and grows now as mad with envy as he was before with grief. Truth and justice are no protection against malice. Envy is blind to all objects, save other men's happiness. If the eyes of men could be contained within their own bounds, and not rove forth into comparisons, there could be no place for this vicious affection: but, when they have once taken this lawless scope to themselves, they lose the knowledge of home, and care only to be employed abroad in their own torment.

Never was Saul's breast so fit a lodging for the evil spirit, as now that it is dressed up with envy. It is as impossible that hell should be free from devils, as a malicious heart. Now doth the frantic king of Israel renew his old fits, and walks and talks distractedly; he was mad with David, and who but David must be called to allay his madness? Such was David's wisdom, he could not but know the terms wherein he stood with Saul; yet, in lieu of the harsh and discordant notes of his master's envy, he returns pleasing music unto him. He can never be a good courtier, nor good man, that hath not learned to repay, if not injuries with thanks, yet evil with good. While there was a harp in David's hand, there was a spear in Saul's, wherewith he threatens death, as the recompense of that sweet melody. He said, "I will smite David through to the wall." It is well for the innocent, that wicked men cannot keep their own counsel. God fetcheth their thoughts out of their mouths, or their countenance, for a seasonable prevention, which else might proceed to secret execution. It was time for David to withdraw himself; his obedience did not tie him to be the mark of a furious master; he might ease Saul with his music, with his blood he might not: twice therefore doth he avoid the presence, not the court, nor the service of Saul.

One would have thought rather, that David should have been afraid of Saul, because the devil was so strong with him, than that Saul should be afraid of David, because the Lord was with him; yet we find all the fear in Saul of David, none in David of Saul. Hatred and fear are ordinary companions. David had wisdom and faith to dispel his fears; Saul had nothing but infidelity, and dejected, self-condemned, distempered thoughts, which must needs nourish them; yet Saul could not fear any hurt from David, whom he found so loyal and serviceable: he fears only too much good unto David; and the envious fear is much more than the distrustful. Now David's presence begins to be more displeasing than his music was sweet; despite itself had rather prefer him to a remote dignity, than endure him a nearer attendant. This promotion increaseth David's honour and love; and his love and honour aggravates Saul's hatred and fear.

Saul's madness hath not bereaved him of his craft; for, perceiving how great David was grown in the reputation of Israel, he dares not offer any personal or direct violence to him, but hires him into the jaws of a supposed death, by no less price than his eldest daughter. "Behold my eldest daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife; only be a valiant son to me, and fight the Lord's battles." Could ever man speak more graciously, more holily? What could be more graciously offered by a king than his eldest daughter? What care could be more holy than of the Lord's battles? Yet never did Saul intend so much mischief to David, or so much unfaithfulness to God, as when he spake thus. There is never so much danger of the falsehearted, as when they make the fairest weather. Saul's spear bade David be gone, but his plausible words invite him to danger. This honour was due to David before, upon the compact of his victory; yet he, that twice inquired into the reward of that enterprise before he undertook it, never demanded it after that achievement; neither had Saul the justice to offer it as a recompense of so noble an exploit, but as a snare to envied victory. Charity suspects not: David construes that, as an effect and argument of his master's love, which was no other but a child of envy, but a plot of mischief; and though he knew his own desert, and the justice of his claim to Merab, yet he, in a sincere humility, disparageth himself, his and parentage, with a "Who am I!"

As it was not the purpose of this modesty in David to reject, but to solicit the proffered favour of Saul, so was it not in the power of this bashful humiliation to turn back the edge of so keen an envy. It helps not, that David makes himself mean, while others magnify his worth: whatsoever the colour was, Saul meant nothing to David but danger and death: and since all those battles will not effect that which he desired, himself will not effect that which he promised. If he cannot kill David, he will disgrace him. David's honour was Saul's disease; it was not likely, therefore, that Saul would add unto that honour whereof he was so sick already. Merab was given unto another; neither do I hear David complain of so manifest an injustice: he knew, that the God whose battles he fought, had provided a due reward of his patience. If Merab fail, God hath a Michal in store for him; she is in love with David; his comeliness and valour hath so won her heart, that she now emulates the affection of her brother Jonathan. If she be the younger sister, yet she is more affectionate. Saul is glad of the news; his daughter could never live to do him better service, than to be a new snare to his adversary. She shall be therefore sacrificed to his envy; and her honest and sincere love shall be made a bait for her worthy and innocent husband. "I will give him her, that she may be a snare unto him, that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." The purpose of any favour is more than the value of it. Even the greatest honours may be given with an intent of destruction. Many a man is raised up for a fall. So forward is Saul in the match, that he sends spokesmen to solicit David to that honour, which he hopes will prove the highway to death. The dowry is set, a hundred foreskins of the Philistines; not their heads, but their foreskins, that this victory might be more ignominious; still thinking, Why may not one David miscarry, as well as a hundred Philistines? And what doth Saul's envy all this while, but enhance David's zeal, and valour, and glory? That good captain, little imagining that himself was the Philistine whom Saul maligned, supererogates off his master, and brings two hundred for one; and returns home safe, and renowned. Neither can Saul now fly off for shame: there is no remedy, but David must be a son, where he was a rival; and Saul must feed upon his own heart, since he cannot see David's. God's blessing graces equally together with men's malice; neither can they devise, which way to make us more happy, than by wishing us evil.

CONTEMPLATION VI.—MICHAL'S WILE.

THIS advantage can Saul yet make of David's promotion, that as his adversary is raised higher, so he is drawn nearer to the opportunity of death. Now hath his envy cast off all shame, and, since those crafty plots succeed not, he directly suborns murderers of his rival. There is none in all the court that is not set on to be an executioner. Jonathan himself is solicited to imbrue his hand in the blood of his friend, of his brother. Saul could not but see Jonathan's clothes on David's back; he could not but know the league of their love; yet, because he knew withal how much the prosperity of David would prejudice Jonathan, he hoped to have found him his son in malice. Those that have the jaundice see all things yellow: those, which are overgrown with malicious passions, think all men like themselves.

I do not hear of any reply that Jonathan made to his father, when he gave him that bloody charge; but he waits for a fit time to dissuade him from so cruel an injustice. Wisdom had taught him to give way to rage, and in so hard an adventure to crave aid of opportunity. If we be not careful to observe good moods, when we deal with the passionate, we may exasperate instead of reforming. Thus did Jonathan, who, knowing how much better it is to be a good friend than an ill son, had not only disclosed that ill counsel, but, when he found his father in the fields, in a calmer temper, laboured to divert it. And so far doth the seasonable and pithy oratory of Jonathan prevail, that Saul is convinced of his wrong, and swears, "As God lives, David shall not die." Indeed, how could it be otherwise, upon the plea of David's innocence and well-deservings? How could Saul say, he should die, whom he could accuse of nothing but faithfulness? Why should he design him to death, which had given life to all Israel? Oftimes wicked men's judgments are forced to yield unto that truth, against which their affections maintain a rebellion. Even the foulest hearts do sometimes entertain good motions: like as, on the contrary, the holiest souls give way sometimes to the suggestions of evil. The flashes of lightning may be discerned in the darkest prisons. But if good thoughts look into a wicked heart they stay not there; as those that like not their lodging, they are soon gone: hardly any thing distinguishes betwixt good and evil, but continuance. The light that shines into a holy heart is constant, like that of the sun, which keeps due times, and varies not his course for any of these sublunary occasions.

The Philistines' wars renew David's victories, and David's victory renews Saul's envy, and Saul's envy renews the plots of David's death. Vows and oaths are forgotten. That evil spirit which vexes Saul hath found so much favour with him, as to win him to these bloody machinations against an innocent: his own hands shall first be employed in this execution; the spear, which hath twice before threatened death to David, shall now once again go upon that message. Wise David, that knew the danger of a hollow friend, and reconciled enemy, and that found more cause to mind Saul's earnest, than his own play, gives way by his nimbleness to that deadly weapon, and, resigning that stroke unto the wall, flies for his life. No man knows how to be sure of an unconscionable man. If either goodness, or merit, or affinity, or reasons, or oaths, could secure a man, David had been safe; now, if his heels do no more befriend him than all these, he is a dead man. No sooner is he gone than messengers are sped after him. It hath been seldom seen that wickedness wanted executioners: David's house is beset with murderers, which watch at all his doors for the opportunity of blood. Who can but wonder, to see how God hath fetched from the loins of Saul a remedy for the malice of Saul's heart? His own children are the only means to cross him in the sin, and to preserve his guiltless adversary. Michal hath more than notice of the plot, and with her subtle wit countermines her father, for the rescue of a husband: she taking the benefit of the night, lets David down through a window; he is gone, and disappoints the ambushes of Saul. The messengers begin to be impatient of this delay, and now think it time to inquire after their prisoner: she puts them off, with the excuse of David's sickness, so as now her husband had good leisure for his escape, and lays a statue in his bed. Saul likes the news of any evil befallen to David; but fearing he is not sick enough, sends to aid his disease. The messengers return, and rushing into the house with their swords drawn, after some harsh words to their imagined charge, surprise a sick statue lying with a pillow under his head; and now blush to see they have spent all their threats upon a senseless stock, and made themselves ridiculous, while they would be serviceable.

But how shall Michal answer this mockage unto her furious father? Hitherto she hath done like David's wife; now she begins to be Saul's daughter; "He said to me, Let me go, or else I will kill thee." She, whose wit had delivered her husband from the sword of her father, now turns the edge of her father's wrath from herself to her husband. His absence made her presume of his safety. If Michal had not been of Saul's plot, he had never expostulated with her in those terms, "Why hast thou let mine enemy escape?" Neither had she framed that answer, "He said, Let me go." I do not find any great store of religion in Michal: for, both she had an image in the house, and afterward mocked David for his devotion: yet nature hath taught her to prefer a husband to a father; to elude a father, from whom she could not fly, to save a husband, who durst not but fly from her. The bonds of matrimonial love are, and should be, stronger than those of nature. Those respects are mutual, which God appointed in the first institution of wedlock, that husband and wife should leave father and mother for each other's sake. Treason is ever odious; but so much more in the marriage-bed, by how much the obligations are deeper.

As she loved her husband better than her father, so she loved herself better than her husband; she saved her husband by a wile, and now she saves herself by a lie, and loses half the thank of her deliverance by an officious slander. Her act was good, but she wants courage to maintain it; and therefore seeks to the weak shelter of untruth. Those that do good offices, not out of conscience, but good nature or civility, if they meet an affront of danger, seldom come off cleanly, but are ready to catch at all excuses, though base, though injurious: because their grounds are not strong enough to bear them out in suffering for that which they have well done.

Whither doth David fly, but to the sanctuary of Samuel? He doth not (though he knew himself gracious with the soldiers) raise forces, or take some strong fort, and there stand upon his own defence, and at defiance with his king: but he gets him to the college of the prophets, as a man that would seek the peaceable protection of the King of heaven, against the unjust fury of a king on earth: only the wing of God shall hide him from that violence.

God intended to make David not a warrior, and a king only, but a prophet too. As the field fitted him for the first, and the court for the second, so Najoth shall fit him for the third. Doubtless, such was David's delight in holy meditations, he never spent his time so contentedly, as when he was retired to that divine academy, and had so full freedom to enjoy God, and to satiate himself with heavenly exercises. The only doubt is, how Samuel can give harbour to a man fled from the anger of his prince; wherein the very persons of both give abundant satisfaction; for both Samuel knew the counsel of God, and durst do nothing without it; and David was by Samuel anointed from God. This unction was a mutual bond. Good reason had David to sue to him, which had poured the oil on his head, for the hiding of that head which he had anointed; and good reason had Samuel to hide him whom God by his means had chosen, from him whom God had by his sentence rejected; besides that, the cause deserved commiseration. Here was not a malefactor running away from justice, but an innocent avoiding murder; not a traitor countenanced against his sovereign, but the deliverer of Israel harboured in a sanctuary of prophets, till his peace might be made.

Even thither doth Saul send to apprehend David. All his rage did not incense him against Samuel as the abettor of his adversary; such an impression of reverence had the person and calling of the prophet left in the mind of Saul, that he cannot think of lifting up his hand against him. The same God, who did at the first put an awe of man in the fiercest creatures, hath stamped in the cruellest hearts a reverend respect to his own image in his ministers; so as even they that hate them do yet honour them.

Saul's messengers came to lay hold on David; God lays hold on them. No sooner do they see a company of prophets busy in these divine exercises, under the moderation of Samuel, than they are turned from executioners to prophets. It is good going up to Najoth, into the holy assemblies; who knows how we may be changed, beside our intentions? Many a one hath come into God's house to carp, or scoff, or sleep, or gaze, that hath returned a convert.

The same heart, that was thus disquieted with David's happy success, is now vexed with the holiness of his other servants. It angers him that God's Spirit could find no other time to seize upon his agents, than when he had sent them to kill; and now, out of an indignation at this disappointment, himself will go, and be his own servant; his guilty soul finds itself out of the danger of being thus surprised; and, behold, Saul is no sooner come within the smell of the smoke of Najoth, than he also prophesies; the same spirit that, when he went first from Samuel, enabled him to prophesy, returns in the same effect, now that he was going his last unto Samuel. This was such a grace as might well stand with rejection: an extraordinary gift of the Spirit, but not sanctifying. Many men have had their mouths opened to prophesy unto others, whose hearts have been deaf to God. But this, such as it was, was far from Saul's purpose, who, instead of expostulating with Samuel, falls down before him; and, laying aside his weapons and his robes, of a tyrant proves for the time a disciple. All hearts are in the hands of their Maker; how easy is it for him that gave them their being, to frame them to his own bent! Who can be afraid of malice, that knows what hooks God hath in the nostrils of men and devils? what charms he hath for the most serpentine hearts?

CONTEMPLATION VII.—DAVID AND AHIMELECH.

Who can ever judge of the children by the parents, that knows Jonathan was the son of Saul! There was never a falser heart than Saul's: there was never a truer friend than Jonathan: neither the hope of a kingdom, nor the frowns of a father, nor the fear of death, can remove him from his vowed amity. No son could be more officious and dutiful to a good father; yet he lays down nature at the foot of grace, and, for the preservation of his innocent rival for the kingdom, crosses the bloody designs of his own parent. David needs no other counsellor, no other advocate, no other intelligencer, than he. It is not in the power of Saul's unnatural reproaches, or of his spear, to make Jonathan any other than a friend and patron of innocence. Even, after all these difficulties, doth Jonathan shoot beyond David, that Saul might shoot short of him. In vain are those professions of love, which are not answered with action. He is no true friend, that, besides talk, is not ready both to do and suffer.

Saul is no whit the better for his prophesying; he no sooner rises up from before Samuel, than he pursues David. Wicked men are rather the worse for those transitory good motions they have received. If the swine be never so clean washed, she will wallow again. That we have good thoughts, it is no thank to us; that we answer them not, it is both our sin and judgment.

David hath learned not to trust these fits of devotion, but flies from Samuel to Jonathan, from Jonathan to Ahimelech; when he was hunted from the prophet, he flies to the priest, as one that knew justice and compassion should dwell in those breasts which are consecrated unto God.

The ark and the tabernacle were then separated; the ark was at Kirjath-jearim, the tabernacle at Nob; God was present with both. Whither should David fly for succour, but to the house of that God which had anointed him?

Ahimelech was wont to see David attended with the troops of Israel, or with the gallants of the court; it seems strange therefore to him, to see so great a peer and champion of Israel come alone. These are the alterations to which earthly greatness is subject. Not many days are passed, since no man was honoured at court but Jonathan and David: now they are both for the time in disgrace: now dare not the king's son-in-law, brother to the prince both in love and in marriage, show his head at the court: nor any of those that bowed to him dare stir a foot with him. Princes are as the sun, and great subjects are like to dials; if the sun shine not on the dial, no man will look at it.

Even he that overcame the bear, the lion, the giant, is overcome with fear. He that had cut off two hundred foreskin of the Philistines, had not circumcised his own heart of the weak passions that follow distrust: now that he is hard driven, he practises to help himself with an unwarrantable shift. Who can look to pass this pilgrimage without infirmities, when David dissembleth to Ahimelech? A weak man's rules may be better than the best man's actions. God lets us see some blemishes in his holiest servants, that we may neither be too highly conceited of flesh and blood, nor too much dejected when we have been miscarried into sin. Hitherto hath David gone upright, now he begins to halt with the priest of God; and, under pretence of Saul's employment, draws that favour from Ahimelech, which shall afterwards cost him his head.

What could Ahimelech have thought too dear for God's anointed, God's champion? It is not like but that, if David had sincerely opened himself to the priest as he hath done to the prophet, Ahimelech would have seconded Samuel in some secret and safe succour of so unjust a distress, whereas he is now, by a false colour, led to that kindness which shall be prejudicial to his life. Extremities of evil are commonly inconsiderate; either for that we have not leisure to our thoughts, or perhaps (so as we may be perplexed) not thoughts to our leisure. What would David have given afterwards to have redeemed this oversight.

Under this pretence he craves a double favour of Ahimelech, the one of bread for his sustenance, the other of a sword for his defence. There was no bread under the hands of the priest, but that which was consecrated to God, and whereof none might taste but the devoted servants of the altar; even that which was, with solemn dedication, set upon the holy tables before the face of God; a sacramental bread presented to God with incense, figuring that true bread that came done from heaven: yet even this bread might, in case of necessity, become common, and be given by Ahimelech, and received by David and his followers. Our Saviour himself justifies the act of both. Ceremonies must give place to substance. God will have mercy and not sacrifice. Charity is the sum and the end of the law, that must be aimed at in all our actions, wherein it may fall out, that the way to keep the law may be to break it; the intention may be kept, and the latter violated; and it may be a dangerous transgression of the law to observe the words, and neglect the scope of God. That which would have dispensed with David for the substance of the act, would have much more dispensed with him for the circumstance: the touch of their lawful wives had contracted a legal impurity, not a moral; that could have been no sufficient reason, why in an urgent necessity they might not have partaken of the holy bread. Ahimelech was no perfect casuist; these men might not famish, if they were ceremonially impure. But this question bewrayed the care of Ahimelech in distributing the holy bread. There might be in these men a double incapacity, the one as they were seculars, the other as unclean; he saw the one must be, he feared lest the other should be; as one that wished as little indisposition as possible might be, in those which should be fed from God's table.

It is strange that David should come to the priest of God for a sword; Who in all Israel was so unlikely to furnish him with weapons, as a man of peace, whose armour was only spiritual? Doubtless David knew well where Goliah's sword lay, as the noble relic of God's victorious deliverance, dedicated to the same God which won it; at this did that suit aim. None could be so fit for David, none could be so fit for it as David. Who could have so much right to that sword, as he against whom it was drawn, and by whom it was taken? there was more in that sword than metal and form: David could never cast his eye upon it, but he saw an undoubted monument of the merciful protection of the Almighty; there was therefore more strength in that sword, than sharpness; neither was David's arm so much strengthened by it, as his faith; nothing can overcome him, while he carries with him that assured sign of victory. It is good to take all occasions of renewing the remembrance of God's mercies to us, and our obligations to him.

Doeg, the master of Saul's herdmen, (for he, that went to seek his father's asses before he was king, hath herds and droves now that he is a king,) was now in the court of the tabernacle, upon some occasion of devotion; though an Israelite in profession, he was an Edomite no less in heart than in blood; yet he hath some vow upon him, and not only comes up to God's house, but abides before the Lord. Hypocrites have equal access to the public places and means of God's service. Even he that knows the heart, yet shuts his door upon none; how much less should we dare to exclude any, which can only judge of the heart by the face!

Doeg may set his foot as far within the tabernacle as David; he sees the passages betwixt him and Ahimelech, and lays them up for an advantage: while he should have edified himself by those holy services, he carps at the priest of God, and, after a lewd misinterpretation of his actions, of an attendant proves an accuser. To incur favour with an unjust master, he informs against innocent Ahimelech, and makes that his act, which was drawn from him by a cunning circumvention. When we see our auditors before us, little do we know with what hearts they are there, nor what use they will make of their pretended devotion. If many come in simplicity of heart to serve their God, some others may perhaps come to observe their teachers, and to pick quarrels where none are: only God, and the issue, can distinguish betwixt a David and a Doeg, when they are both in the tabernacle. Honest Ahimelech could little suspect, that he now offered a sacrifice for his executioner, yea, for the murderer of all his family. O the wise and deep judgments of the Almighty! God owed a revenge to the house of Eli, and now, by the delation of Doeg, he takes occasion to pay it. It was just in God, which in Doeg was most unjust. Saul's cruelty, and the treachery of Doeg, do not lose one dram of their guilt by the counsel of God, neither doth the holy counsel of God gather any blemish by their wickedness. If it had pleased God to inflict death upon them sooner, without any pretence of occasion, his justice had been clear from all imputations; now, if Saul and Doeg be instead of a pestilence or fever, who can cavil? The judgments of God are not open, but are always just: he knows how by one man's sin to punish the sin of another, and, by both their sins and punishments, to glorify himself. If his word sleep, it shall not die, but after long intermissions break forth in those effects which we had forgotten to look for, and ceased to fear. O Lord! thou art sure when thou threatenest, and just when thou judgest. Keep thou us from the sentence of death, else in vain we shall labour to keep ourselves from the execution.

BOOK XIV.

CONTEMPLATION I.—SAUL IN DAVID'S CAVE.

It was the strange lot of David, that those whom he pursued, preserved him from those whom he had preserved. The Philistines, whom David had newly smitten in Keilah, call off Saul from smiting David in the wilderness, when there was but a hillock betwixt him and death. Wicked purposes are easily checked, not easily broken off. Saul's sword is scarce dry from the blood of the Philistines, when it thirsts anew for the blood of David, and now, in a renewed chace, hunts him dry-foot through every wilderness. The very desert is too fair a refuge for innocence. The hills and rocks are searched in an angry jealousy; the very wild goats of the mountains were not allowed to be companions for him, who had no fault but his virtue. O the seemingly unequal distribution of these earthly things! Cruelty and oppression reigns in a palace, while goodness lurks among the rocks and caves, and thinks it happiness enough to steal a life.

Like a dead man, David is fain to be hid under the earth, and seeks the comfort of protection in darkness: and now the wise providence of God leads Saul to his enemy without blood. He, which before brought them within a hill's distance without interview, brings them now both within one roof; so as that, while Saul seeks David and finds him not, he is found of David unsought. If Saul had known his own opportunities, how David and his men had interred themselves, he had saved a treble labour of chace, of execution, and burial; for had he but stopt the mouth of that cave, his enemies had laid themselves down in their own graves. The wisdom of God thinks fit to hide from evil men and spirits, those means and seasons, which might be, if they had been taken, most prejudicial to his own. We had been oft foiled, if Satan could but have known our hearts. Sometimes we lie open to evils, and happy it is for us, that he only knows it, who pities instead of tempting us.

It is not long since Saul said of David, lodged then in Keilah, God hath delivered him into mine hands, for he is shut in, seeing he is come into a city that hath gates and bars; but now contrarily God delivers Saul, ere he was aware, into the hands of David, and without the help of gates and bars, hath inclosed him within the valley of death. How just is it with God, that those who seek mischief to others, find it to themselves, and, even while they are spreading nets, are ensnared, their deliberate plotting of evil is surprised with a sudden judgment.

How amazedly must David needs look, when he saw Saul enter into the cave where himself was! What is this, thinks he, which God hath done? is this presence purposed or casual? is Saul here to pursue or to tempt me? where suddenly the action bewrays the intent, and tells David, that Saul sought secrecy and not him. The superfluity of his maliciousness brought him into the wilderness; the necessity of nature led him into the cave. Even those actions, wherein we place shame, are not exempted from a providence. The fingers of David's followers itched to seize upon their master's enemy; and that they might not seem led so much by faction as by faith, they urge David with a promise from God; The day is come, whereof the Lord saith unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, and thou shalt do unto him as it shall seem good to thee. This argument seemed to carry such command with it, as that David not only may, but must imbrue his hands in blood, unless he will be found wanting to God and himself. Those temptations are most powerful, which fetch their force from the pretence of a religious obedience: whereas those which are raised from arbitrary and private respects, admit of an easy dispensation.

If there was such a prediction, one clause of it was ambiguous, and they take it at the worst; Thou shalt do to him as shall seem good to thee. That might not seem good to him, which seemed evil unto God. There is nothing more dangerous than to make construction of God's purposes out of eventual appearance. If carnal probabilities might be the rule of our judgment, what could God seem to intend other than Saul's death, in offering him naked into the hands of those whom he unjustly persecuted? How could David's soldiers think, that God hath sent Saul thither on any other errand, than to fetch his bane? And if Saul could have seen his own danger, he had given himself for dead: for his heart, guilty to his own bloody desire, could not but have expected the same measure which it meant. But wise and holy David, not transported either with misconceit of the event, or fury of passion, or solicitation of his followers, dares make no other use of this accident than the trial of his loyalty, and the inducement of his peace It had been as easy for him to cut the throat of Saul as his garment; but now his coat only shall be the worse, not his person; neither doth he in this maiming of a cloak seek his own revenge, but a monument of his innocence. Before Saul rent Samuel's garment: now David cutteth Saul's; both were significant: the rending of the one, signified the kingdom torn out of those unworthy hands; the cutting of the other, that the life of Saul might have been as easily cut off.

Saul needs no other monitor of his own danger than what he wears. The upper garment of Saul was laid aside while he went to cover his feet, so as the cut of the garment did not threaten any touch of the body; yet even the violence offered to a remote garment strikes the heart of David, which finds a present remorse for harmfully touching that which once touched the person of his master. Tender consciences are moved to regret at those actions, which strong hearts pass over with a careless ease. It troubled not Saul to seek after the blood of a righteous servant. There is no less difference of consciences than stomachs: some stomachs will digest the hardest meats, and turn over substances, not in their nature edible, while others surfeit of the lightest food, and complain even of dainties. Every gracious heart is in some measure scrupulous, and finds more safety in fear than in presumption: and if it be so straight as to curb itself in from the liberty which it might take in things which are not unlawful, how much less will it dare to take scope unto evil! By how much that state is better, where nothing is allowed, than where all things, by so much is the strict and timorous conscience better than the lawless. There is good likelihood of that man who is any ways scupulous of his ways: but he, who makes no bones of his actions, is apparently hopeless.

Since David's followers pleaded God's testimony to him as a motive to blood, David appeals to the same God for his preservation from blood: The Lord keep me from doing that thing to my master, the Lord's anointed. And now the good man hath work enough to defend both himself and his persecutor: himself from the importunate necessity of doing violence, and his master from suffering it. It was not more easy to rule his own hands, than difficult to rule a multitude. David's troops consisted of malecontents; all that were in distress, in bitterness of soul, were gathered to him. Many, if never so well ordered, are hard to command; a few, if disorderly, more hard; many and disorderly must needs be so much the hardest of all, that David never achieved any victory like unto this, wherein he first overcame himself, then his soldiers.

And what was the charm wherewith David allayed those raging spirits of his followers? No other but this, He is the anointed of the Lord. That holy oil was the antidote for his blood: Saul did not lend David so impierceable an armour, when he should encounter Goliah, as David now lent him in this plea of his unction. Which of all the discontented outlaws that lurked in that cave durst put forth his hand against Saul, when they once heard, He is the Lord's anointed? Such an impression of an awe hath the divine Providence caused his image to make in the hearts of men, as that it makes traitors cowards, so as instead of striking they tremble; how much more lawless, than the outlaws of Israel, are those professed ring-leaders of Christianity, which teach, and practise, and encourage, and reward, and canonize the violation of majesty! It is not enough for those, who are commanders of others, to refrain their own hands from doing evil, but they must carefully prevent the iniquity of their heels, else they shall be justly reputed to do that by others, which, in their own persons, they avoided. The laws both of God and man pre-suppose us in some sort answerable for our charge; as taking it for granted, that we should not undertake those reins which we cannot manage.

There was no reason David should lose the thanks of so noble a demonstration of his loyalty, whereto he trusts so much, that he dares call back the man by whom he was pursued, and make him judge, whether that fact had not deserved a life. As his act, so his word and gesture, imported nothing but humble obedience; neither was there more meekness than force in that seasonable persuasion, wherein he lets Saul see the error of his credulity; the unjust slanders of maliciousness, the opportunity of his revenge, the proof of his forbearance, the undeniable evidence of his innocence; and, after a lowly disparagement of himself, appeals to God for judgmnet, for protection.

So lively and feeling oratory did Saul find in the lap of his garment, and the lips of David, that it is not in the power of his envy, or ill nature, to hold out any longer. "Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lift up his voice and wept, and said, Thou art more righteous than I." He whose harp was wont to quiet the frenzy of Saul, hath now by his words, calmed his fury: so that now he sheds tears instead of blood, and confesses his own wrong, and David's integrity; and, as if he were now again entered into the bounds of Najoth in Ramah, he prays and prophesies good to him, whom he maliced for good. "The Lord render thee good for that thou hast done to me this day; for now, behold, I know that thou shalt be king."

There is no heart made of flesh, that some time or other relents not. even flint and marble will, in some weather, stand on drops. I cannot think these tears and protestations feigned. Doubtless Saul meant as he said, and passed through sensible fits of good and evil. Let no man think himself the better for good motions. The praise and benefit of those guests, is not in the receipt but the retention.

Who, that had seen this meeting, could but have thought that all had been sure on David's side? What can secure us, if not tears, and prayers, and oaths? Doubtless David's men, which knew themselves obnoxious to laws and creditors, began to think of some new refuge, as making account this new-pieced league would be everlasting; they looked when Saul would take David home to the court, and dissolve his army, and recompense that unjust persecution with just honour; when, behold, in the loose, Saul goes home, but David and his men go up unto the hold. Wise David knows Saul not to be more kind than untrusty; and therefore had rather seek safety in his hold, than in the hold of a hollow and unsteady friendship. Here are good words, but no security; which therefore an experienced man gives the hearing, but stands the while upon his guard. No charity binds us to a trust of those whom we have found faithless. Credulity upon weak grounds, after palpable disappointments, is the daughter of folly. A man that is weatherwise, though he find an abatement of the storm, yet will not stir from under his shelter, while he sees it thick in the wind. Distrust is the just gain of unfaithfulness.

CONTEMPLATION II.—NABAL AND ABIGAIL.

If innocency could have secured from Saul's malice, David had not been persecuted; and yet, under that wicked king, aged Samuel dies in his bed. That there might be no place for envy, the good prophet had retired himself to the schools. Yet he, that hated David for what he should be, did no less hate Samuel for what he had been. Even in the midst of Saul's malignity, there remained in his heart impressions of awfulness unto Samuel; he feared where he loved not. The restraint of God curbeth the rage of his most violent enemies, so as they cannot do their worst. As good husbands do not put all their corn to the oven but save some for seed, so doth God ever in the worst of persecutions.

Samuel is dead, David banished, Saul tyrannizeth; Israel hath good cause to mourn: it is no marvel if this lamentation be universal; there is no Israelite that feeleth not the loss of a Samuel. A good prophet is the common treasure, wherein every gracious soul hath a share. That man hath a dry heart, which can part with God's prophet without tears.

Nabal was, according to his name, foolish, yet rich and mighty Earthly possessions are not always accompanied with wit and grace. Even the line of faithful Caleb will afford an ill-conditioned Nabal. Virtue is not, like unto lands, inheritable. All that is traduced with the seed, is either evil or not good. Let no man brag with the Jews, that he hath Abraham to his father; God hath raised up of this stone a son to Caleb.

Abigail (which signifieth her father's joy) had sorrow enough to be matched with so unworthy an husband. If her father had meant she should have had joy in herself or in her life, he had not disposed her to an husband, though rich, yet fond and wicked; it is like he married her to the wealth, not to the man. Many a child is cast away upon riches. Wealth, in our matches, should be as some grains or scruples in the balance, superadded to the gold of virtuous qualities, to weigh down the scales; when it is made the substance of the weight, and good qualities the appendance, there is but one earth poised with another, which, wheresoever it is done, it is a wonder if either the children prove not the parents' sorrow, or the parents theirs.

Nabal's sheep-shearing was famous; three thousand fleeces must needs require many hands; neither is any thing more plentiful, commonly, than a churl's feast. What a world was this, that the noble champion and rescuer of Israel, God's anointed, is driven to send to a base carle for victuals! It is no measuring of men by the depth of the purse, by outward prosperity. Servants are ofttimes set on horseback, while princes go on foot. Our estimation must be led by their inward worth, which is not alterable by time, nor diminished with external conditions.

One rag of a David is more worth than the wardrobes of a thousand Nabals. Even the best deservings may want. No man should be contemned for his necessity; perhaps he may be so much richer in grace, as he is poorer in estate: neither hath violence or casualty more impoverished a David, than his poverty hath enriched him. He, whose folly hath made himself miserable, is justly rewarded with neglect; but he, that suffers for good, deserves so much more honour from others, as his distress is more. Our compassion or respect must be ruled according to the cause of another's misery.

One good turn requires another. In some cases, not hurting is meritorious. He, that should examine the qualities of David's followers, must needs grant it worthy of a fee, that Nabal's flocks lay untouched in Carmel; but more, that David's soldiers were Nabal's shepherds; yea, the keepers of his shepherds gave them a just interest in that sheep-shearing feast; justly should they have been set at the upper end of the table. That Nabal's sheep were safe, he might thank his shepherds; that his shepherds were safe, he might thank David's soldiers. It is no small benefit that we receive in a safe protection; well may we think our substance due, where we owe ourselves. Yet this churlish Nabal doth not only give nothing to David's messengers, but, which is worse than nothing, ill words; "Who is David, or who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days, that break away from their masters." David asked him bread, he giveth him stones. All Israel knew and honoured their deliverer; yet this clown, to save his victuals, will needs make him a man either of no merits or ill, either an obscure man or a fugitive. Nothing is more cheap than good words; these Nabal might have given and been never the poorer: If he had been resolved to shut his hands, in a fear of Saul's revenge, he might have so tempered his denial, that the repulse might have been free from offence; but now his foul mouth doth not only deny, but revile. It should have been Nabal's glory, that his tribe yielded such a successor to the throne of Israel; now in all likelihood, his envy stirs him up to disgrace that man who surpassed him in honour and virtue, more than he was surpassed by him in wealth and ease. Many a one speaks fair, that means ill; but when the mouth speaks foul, it argues a corrupt heart. If, with St James's verbal benefactors, we say only, Depart in peace, warm yourselves, fill your bellies, we shall answer for hypocritical uncharitableness; but if we rate and curse those needy souls whom we ought to relieve, we shall give a more fearful account of a savage cruelty, in trampling on those whom God hath humbled. If healing with good words be justly punishable, what torment is there for those that wound with evil!

David, which had all this while been in the school of patience, hath now his lesson to seek; he, who hath happily digested all the railings and persecutions of a wicked master, cannot put up this affront of a Nabal; nothing can assuage his choler, but blood. How subject are the best of God's saints to weak passions; and if we have the grace to ward an expected blow of temptation, how easily are we surprised with a sudden foil!

Wherefore serve these recorded weaknesses of holy men, but to strengthen us against the conscience of our infirmities? Not that we should take courage to imitate them in the evil whereunto they have been miscarried; but we should take heart to ourselves, against the discouragement of our own evils.

The wisdom of God hath so contrived it, that commonly, in societies, good is mixed with evil: wicked Nabal hath in his house a wise and good servant, a prudent and worthy wife; that wise servant is careful to advertise his mistress of the danger; his prudent mistress is careful to prevent it.

The lives of all his family were now in hazard. She dares not commit this business to the fidelity of a messenger, but forgetting her sex, puts herself into the errand; her foot is not slow, her hand is not empty: according to the offence, she frames her satisfaction. Her husband refused to give, she brings a bountiful gift; her husband gave ill words, she sweetens them with a meek and humble deprecation; her husband could say, "Who is David?" she falls at his feet; her husband dismisses David's men empty, she brings her servants laden with provisions, as if it had been only meant to ease the repelled messengers of the carriage, not to scant them of the required benevolence: no wit, no art, could devise a more pithy and powerful oratory. As all satisfaction, so hers, begins with a confession, wherein she deeply blameth the folly of her husband: she could not have been a good wife, if she had not honoured her unworthy head; if a stranger should have termed him fool in her hearing, he could not have gone away in peace: now, to save his life, she is bold to acknowledge his folly. It is a good disparagement that preserveth. There is the same way to our peace in heaven. The only means to escape judgment, is to complain of our own vileness; she pleadeth her ignorance of the fact, and therein their freedom from the offence; she humbly craveth acceptation of her present, with pardon of the fault. She professeth David's honourable acts and merits; she foretells his future success and glory; she lays before him the happy peace of his soul, in refraining from innocent blood. David's breast, which could not, through the seeds of grace, grow to a stubbornness in ill resolutions, cannot but relent with these powerful and seasonable persuasions; and now, instead of revenge, he blesseth God for sending Abigail to meet him; he blesseth Abigail for her counsel; he blesseth the counsel for so wholesome efficacy, and now rejoiceth more in being overcome with a wise and gracious advice, than he would have rejoiced in a revengeful victory.

A good heart is easily stayed from sinning, and is glad when it finds occasion to be crossed in ill purposes. Those secret checks, which are raised within itself, do readily conspire with all outward retentives: it never yielded to a wicked motion, without much reluctation; and when it is overcome, it is but with half a consent: whereas perverse and obdurate sinners, by reason they take full delight in evil, and have already in their conceit swallowed the pleasure of sin, abide not to be resisted, running on headily in those wicked courses they have propounded, in spite of opposition; and, if they be forcibly stopped in their way, they grow sullen and mutinous. David had not only vowed, but deeply sworn the death of Nabal, and all his family, to the very dog that lay at his door; yet now he praiseth God, that hath given the occasion and grace to violate it. Wicked vows are ill made, but worse kept. Our tongue cannot tie us to commit sin. Good men think themselves happy, that since they had not the grace to deny sin, yet they had not the opportunity to accomplish it. If Abigail had sat still at home, David had sinned, and she had died. Now her discreet admonition hath preserved her from the sworn, and diverted him from bloodshed. And now, what thanks, what benedictions, hath she for this seasonable counsel? How should it encourage us to admonish our brethren, to see that, if we prevail, we have blessings from them; if we prevail not we have yet blessings from God, and thanks of our own hearts!

How near was Nabal to a mischief, and perceives it not; David was coming to the foot of the hill to cut his throat, while he was feasting in his house without fear. Little do sinners know how near their jollity is to perdition. Many times judgment is at the threshold, while drunkenness and surfeit are at the board. Had he been any other than a Nabal, he had not sat down to feast, till he had been sure of his peace with David. Either not to expect danger, or not to clear it, was sottish; so foolish are carnal men, that give themselves over to their pleasures, while there are deadly quarrels depending against them in heaven. There is nothing wherein wisdom is more seen, than in the temperate use of prosperity. A Nabal cannot abound but he must be drunk and surfeit. Excess is a true argument of folly. We use to say, that when drink is in, wit is out; but if wit were not out, drink would not be in.

It was no time to advise Nabal, while his reason was drowned in a deluge of wine. A beast, or a stone, is as capable of good counsel as a drunkard. O that the noblest creature should so far abase himself, as, for a little liquor, to lose the use of those faculties whereby he is a man! Those, that have to do with drink or frenzy, must be glad to watch times; so did Abigail, who, the next morning, presents to her husband the view of his faults, of his danger; he then sees how near he was to death, and felt it not. That wordly mind is so apprehensive of the death that should have been, as that he dies to think that he had like to have died. Who would think a man could be so affected with a danger past and yet so senseless of a future, yea, imminent? He that was yesternight as a beast, is now as a stone: he was then over-merry, now dead and lumpish. Carnal hearts are ever in extremities: if they be once down their dejection is desperate, because they have no inward comfort to mitigate their sorrow. What difference there was betwixt the dispositions of David and Nabal! How oft had David been in the valley of the shadow of death, and feared no evil! Nabal is but once put in mind of a death that might have been, and is stricken dead.

It is just with God, that they who live without grace, should die without comfort; neither can we expect better, while we go on in our sins. The speech of Abigail smote Nabal into a qualm: that tongue hath doubtless oft advised him well, and prevailed not; now it occasions his death, whose reformation it could not affect: she meant nothing but his amendment; God meant to make that loving instrument the means of his revenge. She speaks and God strikes, and within ten days, that swoon ends in death. And now Nabal pays dear for his uncharitable reproach, for his riotous excess. That God, which would not suffer David to right himself by his own sword, takes the quarrel of his servant into his own hand; David hath now his ends without sin, rejoicing in the just executions of God, who would neither suffer him to sin in revenging, nor suffer his adversaries to sin unrevenged.

Our loving God is more angry with the wrongs done to his servants than themselves can be, and knows how to punish that justly, which we could not undertake without wronging God more than men have wronged us. He that saith, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," repays ofttimes when we have forgiven, when we have forgotten; and calls to reckoning after our discharges. It is dangerous offending any favourite of him whose displeasure and revenge is everlasting.

How far God looks beyond our purposes! Abigail came only to plead for an ill husband, and now God makes this journey a preparation for a better: so that, in one act, she preserved an ill husband, and won a good one for the future. David well remembers her comely person, her wise speeches, her graceful carriage; and now, when modesty found it seasonable, he sends to sue her who had been his suppliant. She entreated for her husband; David treats with her for his wife. Her request was to escape his sword; he wisheth her to his bed. It was a fair suit to change a David for a Nabal: to become David's queen, instead of Nabal's drudge. She, that learned humility under so hard a tutor, abaseth herself no less when David offers to advance her; "Let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." None are so fit to be great, as those that can stoop lowest. How could David be more happy in a wife? he finds at once piety, wisdom, humility, faithfulness, wealth, beauty. How could Abigail be more happy in a husband, than in the prophet, the champion, the anointed of God? Those marriages are well made, wherein virtues are matched, and happiness is mutual.

CONTEMPLATION III.—DAVID AND ACHISH.

Good motions that fall into wicked hearts, are like some sparks that fall from the flint and steel into wet tinder, lightsome for the time, but soon out. After Saul's tears and protestations, yet he is now again in the wilderness, with three thousand men, to hunt after innocent David. How invincible is the charity and loyalty of an honest heart! The same hand that spared Saul in the cave, spares him sleeping in the field: the same hand that cut away the lap of his master's garment, carried away his spear; that spear, which might as well have carried away the life of the owner, is only borne away for the proof of the fidelity of the bearer. Still Saul is strong, but David victorious, and triumphs over the malice of his persecutor; yet still the victor flieth from him whom he hath overcome. A man that sees how far Saul was transported with his rancorous envy, cannot but say, that he was never more mad than when he was sober. For even after he had said, "Blessed art thou, my son David, thou shalt do great things, and also prevail;" yet still he pursues him, whom he grants assured to prevail. What is this, but to resolve to lose his labour in sinning, and in spite of himself to offend? How shameful is our inequality of disposition to good! We know we cannot miss of the reward of well-doing, and yet do it not. While wicked men cast away their endeavours upon evil projects, whereof they are sure to fail, sin blinds the eyes and hardens the heart, and thrusts men into wilful mischiefs, however dangerous, however impossible, and never leaves them till it have brought them to utter confusion.

The over-long continuance of a temptation may easily weary the best patience, and may attain that by protraction, which it could never do by violence. David himself at last begins to bend under this trial, and resolves so to fly from Saul, as he runs from the church of God; and, while he will avoid the malice of his master, joins himself with God's enemies. The greatest saints upon earth are not always upon the same pitch of spiritual strength; he that sometimes said, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands," now says, "I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul." He had wont to consult with God, now he says thus in his own heart. How many evident experiments had David of God's deliverances! how certain and clear predictions of his future kingdom! how infallible an earnest was the holy oil, wherewith he was anointed to the crown of Israel! And yet David said in his heart, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul." The best faith is but like the twilight, mixed with some degrees of darkness and infidelity. We do utterly misreckon the greatest earthly holiness, if we exempt it from infirmities. It is not long since David told Saul, that those wicked enemies of his, which cast him out from abiding in the inheritence of the Lord, did as good bid him, Go serve other gods; yet now is he gone, from the inheritance of God, into the land of the Philistines. That Saul might seek him no more, he hides himself out of the list of the church, where a good man would not look for him. Once before had David fled to this Achish, when he was glad to scrabble on the doors, and let his spittle fall upon his beard, in a semblance of madness, that he might escape; yet now, in a semblance of friendship, is he returned to save that life which he was in danger to have lost in Israel. Goliah the champion of the Philistines, whom David slew, was of Gath: yet David dwells with Achish, king of the Philistines, in Gath: even amongst them whose foreskins he had presented to Saul, by two hundreds at once, doth David choose to reside for safety. Howsoever it was weakness in David, thus, by his league of amity, to strengthen the enemies of God; yet doth not God take advantage of it for his overthrow, but gives him protection even where his presence offended; and gives him favour where himself bore just hatred. O the infinite patience and mercy of our God, who doth good to us for our evil, and, in the very act of our provocation, upholdeth, yea blesseth us with preservation!

Could Saul have rightly considered it, he had found it no small loss and impairing to his kingdom, that so valiant a captain, attended with six hundred able soldiers and their families, should forsake his land, and join with his enemies; yet he is not quiet till he have abandoned his own strength. The world hath none so great an enemy to a wicked man as himself; his hands cannot be held from his own mischief; he will needs make his friends enemies, his enemies victors, himself miserable.

David was too wise to cast himself into the hands of a Philistine king, without assurance; what assurance could he have, but promises! Those David had from Saul abundantly, and trusted them not; he dares trust the fidelity of a pagan, he dares not trust the vows of a king of Israel. There may be fidelity without the church, and falsehood within. It need not be any news, to find some Turks true, and some Christians faithless.

Even unwise men are taught by experience; how much more they, who have wit to learn without it! David had well found what it was to live in a court; he therefore, whom envy drove from the court of Israel, voluntarily declines the Philistine court, and sues for a country habitation. It had not been possible for so noted a stranger, after so much Philistine bloodshed, to live long in such an eminency amongst the press of those, whose sons, or brothers, or fathers, or allies, he had slaughtered, without some perilous machination of his ruin; therefore he makes suit for an early remove: "For why should thy servant dwell in the chief city of the kingdom with thee?" Those that would stand sure, must not affect too much height, or conspicuity: the tall cedars are most subject to winds and lightnings, while the shrubs of the valleys stand unmoved. Much greatness doth but make a fairer mark for evil. There is true firmness and safety in mediocrity.

How rarely is it seen that a man loseth by his modesty! The change fell out well to David, of Ziklag for Gath: now he hath a city of his own; all Israel, where he was anointed, afforded him not so much possession. Now the city, which was anciently assigned to Judah, returns to the just owner, and is, by this means, entailed to the crown of David's successors. Besides that, now might David live out of the sight and hearing of the Philistine idolatries, and enjoy God no less in the walls of a Philistine city, than in an Israelitish wilderness: withal, a happy opportunity was now opened to his friends of Israel to resort unto his aid: the heads of the thousands that were of Manasseh, and many valiant captains of the other tribes, fell daily to him, and raised his six hundred followers to an army like the host of God. The deserts of Israel could never have yielded David so great an advantage. That God, whose the earth is, makes room for his own every where, and ofttimes provideth them a foreign home more kindly than the native. It is no matter for change of our soil, so we change not our God; if we can every where acknowledge him, he will no where be wanting to us.

It was not for God's champion to be idle; no sooner is he free from Saul's sword, than he begins an offensive war against the Amalekites, Gerizites, Geshurites; he knew these nations branded by God to destruction, neither could his increasing army be maintained with a little; by one act therefore he both revenges for God, and provides for his host. Had it not been for that old quarrel, which God had with this people, David could not be excused for a bloody cruelty, in killing whole countries, only for the benefit of the spoil; now his soldiers were at once God's executioners, and their own foragers. The intervention of a command from the Almighty alters the state of any act, and makes that worthy of praise, which else were no better than damnable. It is now justice, which were otherwise murder. The will of God is the rule of good; what need we inquire into other reasons of any act or determination, when we hear it comes from heaven?

How many hundred years had this brood of Canaanites lived securely in their country, since God commanded them to be rooted out, and now promised themselves the certainest peace! The Philistines were their friends, if not their lords: the Israelites had their hands full, neither did they know any grudge betwixt them and their neighbours, when suddenly the sword of David cuts them off, and leaves none alive to tell the news.

There is no safety in protraction; with men, delay causeth forgetfulness, or abates the force of anger, as all violent motions are weakest at the furthest; but with Him, to whom all times are present, what can be gained by prorogation? Alas! what can it avail any of the cursed seed of Canaan, that they have made a truce with heaven, and a league with hell! Their day is coming, and is not the further off, because they expect it not.

Miserable were the straits of David, while he was driven not only to maintain his army by spoil, but to colour his spoil by a sinful dissimulation; he tells Achish, that he had been roving against the south of Judah, and the south of the Jerahmelites, and the south of the Kenites, either falsely or doubtfully, so as he meant to deceive him under whom he lived, and by whom he was trusted. If Achish were a Philistine, yet he was David's friend, yea his patron; and if he had been neither, it had not become David to be false. The infirmities of God's children never appear but in their extremities. It is hard for the best man to say how far he will be tempted. If a man will put himself among Philistines, he cannot promise to come forth innocent.

How easily do we believe that which we wish! The more credit Achish gives unto David, the more sin it was to deceive him. And now the conceit of this engagement procures him a further service. The Philistines are assembled to fight with Israel; Achish dares trust David on his side, yea, to keep his head for ever; neither can David do any less than promise his aid against his own flesh. Never was David, in all his life, driven to so hard an exigent; never was he so extremely perplexed; for what should he do now? To fight with Achish, he was tied by promise, by merit; not to fight against Israel, he was tied by his calling, by his unction; not to fight for Achish were to be unthankful; to fight against Israel, were to be unnatural. O what an inward battle must David needs have in his breast, when he thinks of this battle of Israel and the Philistines! How doth he wish now, that he had rather stood to the hazard of Saul's persecution, than to have put himself upon the favour of Achish: he must fight on one side, and on whether side soever he should fight, he could not avoid to be treacherous; a condition worse than death to an honest heart. Which way he would have resolved, if it had come to the execution, who can know, since himself was doubtful? Either course had been no better than desperate. How could the Israelites ever have received him for their king, who, in the open field, had fought against them? And, contrarily, if he would have fought against his friend for his enemy, against Achish for Saul, he was now environed with jealous Philistines, and might rather look for the punishment of his treason, than the glory of a victory.

His heart had led him into these straits; the Lord finds a way to lead him out; the suggestions of his enemies do herein befriend him; the princes of the Philistines, whether of envy or suspicion, plead for David's dismission; "Send this fellow back, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him: and let him not go down to the battle, lest he be an adversary to us." No advocate could have said more, himself durst not have said so much. O the wisdom and goodness of our God, that can raise up an adversary to deliver out of those evils, which our friends cannot: that, by the sword of an enemy, can let out that apostume, which no physician could tell how to cure! It would be wide with us sometimes, if it were not for others' malice.

There could not be a more just question, than this of the Philistine princes: "What do these Hebrews here?" An Israelite is out of his element, when he is in an army of Philistines. The true servants of God are in their due places, when they are in opposition to his enemies. Profession of hostility becomes them better than leagues of amity.

Yet Achish likes David's conversation and presence so well, that he professeth himself pleased with him, as with an angel of God. How strange it is to hear, that a Philistine should delight in that holy man whom an Israelite abhors, and should be loath to be quit of David whom Saul hath expelled! Terms of civility are equally open to all religions, to all professions: the common graces of God's children are able to attract love from the most obstinate enemies of goodness: If we affect them for by respects of valour, wisdom, discourse, wit, it is their praise, not ours; but, if for divine grace and religion, it is our praise with theirs.

Such now was David's condition, that he must plead for that he feared, and argue against that which he desired; "What have I done, and what hast thou found in thy servant, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" Never any news could be more cordial to him than this of his dismission; yet must he seem to strive against it, with an importunate profession of his forwardness to that act which he most detested.

One degree of dissimulation draws on another; those which have once given way to a faulty course, cannot easily either stop or turn back, but are, in a sort, forced to second their ill beginnings with worse proceedings. It is a dangerous and miserable thing to cast ourselves into those actions, which draw with them a necessity either of offending or miscarriage.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

EVEN the worst men may sometimes make head against some sins. Saul hath expelled the sorcerers out of the land of Israel; and hath forbidden magic upon pain of death. He that had no care to expel Satan out of his own heart, yet will seem to drive him out of his kingdom. That we see wicked men oppose themselves to some sins, there is neither marvel nor comfort in it. No doubt Satan made sport at this edict of Saul: what cares he to be banished in sorcery, while he is entertained in malice? He knew and found Saul his, while he resisted; and smiled to yield thus far unto his vassal. If we quit not all sins, he will be content we should either abandon or persecute some.

Where there is no place for holy fear, there will be place for the servile. The graceless heart of Saul was astonished at the Philistines; yet was never moved at the frowns of that God whose anger sent them, nor of those sins of his which procured them. Those that cannot fear for love, shall tremble for fear; and how much better is awe than terror, prevention than confusion! There is nothing more lamentable than to see a man laugh when he should fear; God shall laugh when such a one's fear cometh.

Extremity of distress will send even the profanest man to God; like as the drowning man reacheth out his hand to that bough, which he contemned, while he stood safe on the bank. Saul now asketh counsel of the Lord, whose prophet he hated, whose priest he slew, whose anointed he persecutes; had Saul consulted with God when he should, this evil had not been; but now, if this evil had not been, he had not consulted with God; the thank of this act is due, not to him, but to his affliction. A forced piety is thankless and unprofitable; God will not answer him neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Why should God answer that man by dreams, who had resisted him waking? Why should he answer him by Urim, that had slain his priests? Why should he answer him by prophets, who hated the Father of the prophets, and rebelled against the word of the prophets?

It is an unreasonable inequality to hope to find God at our command, when we would not be at his; to look that God should regard our voice in trouble, when we would not regard his in peace.

Unto what mad shifts are men driven by despair! If God will not answer, Satan shall. "Saul said to his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit." If Saul had not known this course devilish, why did he decree to banish it, to mulct it with death? yet now, against the stream of his conscience, he will seek to those whom he had condemned; there needs no other judge of Saul's act than himself; had he not before opposed this sin, he had not so heinously sinned in committing it. There cannot be a more fearful sign of a heart given up to a reprobate sense, than to cast itself wilfully into those sins, which it hath proclaimed to detest. The declinations to evil are many times insensible, but when it breaks forth into such apparent effects, even other eyes may discern it. What was Saul the better to foreknow the issue of his approaching battle? If this consultation could have strengthened him against his enemies, or promoted his victory, there might have been some colour for so foul an act: now, what could he gain, but the satisfying of his bootless curiosity, in foreseeing that which he should not be able to avoid?

Foolish men give away their souls for nothing. The itch of impertinent and unprofitable knowledge hath been the hereditary disease of the sons of Adam and Eve. How many have perished to know that which hath procured their perishing? How ambitious should we be to know these things, the knowledge whereof is eternal life!

Many a lewd office are they put to, who serve wicked masters; one while, Saul's servants are sent to kill innocent David; another while, to shed the blood of God's priests; and now they must go seek for a witch. It is no small happiness to attend them, from whom we may receive precepts and examples of virtue.

Had Saul been good, he had needed no disguise; honest actions never shame the doers; now, that he goeth about a sinful business, he changeth himself; he seeks the shelter of the night; he takes but two followers with him: it is true, that if Saul had come in the port of a king, the witch had as much dissembled her condition as now he dissembleth his; yet it was not only desire to speed, but guiltiness that thus altered his habit. Such is the power of conscience, that even those who are most affected to evil, yet are ashamed to be thought such as they desire to be.

Saul needed another face to fit that tongue, which should say, "Conjecture to me by the familiar spirit, and bring me up whom I shall name unto thee." An obdurate heart can give way to any thing.

Notwithstanding the peremptory edict of Saul, there are still witches in Israel. Neither good laws, nor careful executions, can purge the church from malefactors; there will still be some that will jeopard their heads upon the grossest sins. No garden can be so curiously tended, that there should not be one weed left in it. Yet so far can good statutes, and due inflictions of punishment upon offenders, prevail, that mischievous persons are glad to pull in their heads, and dare not do ill but in disguise and darkness. It is no small advantage of justice, that it affrights sin, if it cannot be expelled; as contrarily, woeful is the condition of that place, where is a public profession of wickedness.

The witch was no less crafty than wicked; she had before, as is like, bribed officers to escape indictment, to lurk in secrecy; and now she will not work her feats without security; her suspicion projects the worst; "Wherefore seekest thou to take me in a snare, to cause me to die?" O, vain sorceress, that could be wary to avoid the punishment of Saul, careless to avoid the judgment of God! Could we forethink what our sin would cost us, we durst not but be innocent: this is a good and seasonable answer for us to make unto Satan when he solicits us to evil, "Wherefore seekest thou to take me in a snare, to cause me to die?" Nothing is more sure than this intention in the tempter, than this event in the issue. O that we could but so much fear the eternal pains, as we do the temporary, and be but so careful to save our souls from torment, as our bodies!

No sooner hath Saul sworn her safety, than she addresseth herself to her sorcery: hope of impunity draws on sin with boldness. Were it not for the delusions of false promises, Satan should have no clients. Could Saul be so ignorant as to think that magic had power over God's deceased saints, to raise them up, yea, to call them down from their rest? Time was, when Saul was among the prophets. And yet now, that he is in the impure lodge of devils, how senseless he is, to say, "Bring me up Samuel!" It is no rare thing to lose even our wit and judgment, together with graces: how justly are they given to sottishness, that have given themselves over to sin!

The sorceress, it seems, exercising her conjurations in a room apart, is informed by her familiar, who it was that set her on work; she can therefore find time, in the midst of her exorcisms, to bind the assurance of her own safety by expostulation: "She cried with a loud voice, why hast thou deceived me, for thou art Saul." The very name of Saul was an accusation: yet he is so far from striking his breast, that, doubting lest this fear of the witch should interrupt the desired work, he encourages her whom he should have condemned: "Be not afraid;" he that had more cause to fear, for his own sake, in an expectation of just judgment, cheers up her that feared nothing but himself. How ill doth it become us to give that counsel to others, whereof we more need and use in our own persons!

As one that had more care to satisfy his own curiosity, than her suspicion, he asks, "What sawest thou?" Who would not have looked, that Saul's hair should have started on his head, to hear of a spirit raised! His sin hath so hardened him, that he rather pleases himself in it, which hath nothing in it but horror: so far is Satan content to descend to the service of his servants, that he will approve his feigned obedience to their very outward senses; what form is so glorious, that he either cannot or dare not undertake? Here God ascends out of the earth; elsewere Satan transforms him into an angel of light; what wonder is it, that his wicked instruments appear like saints in their hypocritical dissimulation! If we will be judging by the appearance, we shall be sure to err. No eye could distinguish betwixt the true Samuel and a false spirit. Saul, who was well worthy to be deceived, seeing those grey hairs, and that mantle, inclines himself to the ground, and bows himself. He that would not worship God in Samuel alive, now worships Samuel in Satan; and no marvel, Satan was now become his refuge instead of God; his Urim was darkness, his prophet a ghost. Every one that consults with Satan worships him, though he bow not, neither doth that evil spirit desire any other reverence, than to be sought unto.

How cunningly doth Satan resemble not only the habit and gesture, but the language of Samuel: "Wherefore hast thou disquieted me, and wherefore dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is gone from thee, and is thine enemy?" Nothing is more pleasing to that evil one, than to be solicited; yet, in the person of Samuel, he can say, "Why hast thou disquieted me?" Had not the Lord been gone from Saul, he had never come to the devilish oracle of Endor; and yet the counterfeiting spirit can say, "Why dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is gone from thee?" Satan cares not how little he is known to be himself; he loves to pass under any form, rather than his own.

The more holy the person is, the more carefully doth Satan act him, that by his stale he may ensnare us. In every motion it is good to try the spirits, whether they be of God. Good words are no means to distinguish a prophet from a devil. Samuel himself, while he was alive, could not have spoken more gravely, more severely, more divinely, than this evil ghost: "For the Lord will rend thy kingdom out of thy hand, and give it to thy neighbour David, because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon the Amalekites, therefore hath the Lord done this unto thee this day." When the devil himself puts on gravity and religion, who can marvel at the hypocrisy of men? Well may lewd men be good preachers, when Satan himself can play the prophet. Where are those ignorants, that think charitably of charms and spells, because they find nothing in them but good words? What prophet could speak better words than this devil in Samuel's mantle? Neither is there at any time so much danger of that evil spirit, as when he speaks best.

I could wonder to hear Satan preach thus prophetically, if I did not know, that as he was once a good angel, so he can still act what he was. While Saul was in consultation of sparing Agag, we shall never find that Satan would lay any block in his way: yea, then he was a prompt orator to induce him into that sin; now, that it is past and gone, he can lade Saul with fearful denunciations of judgment. Till we have sinned, Satan is a parasite; when we have sinned, he is a tyrant. What cares he to flatter any more, when he hath what he would? Now his only work is to terrify and confound, that he may enjoy what he hath won: how much better it is serving that master, who, when we are most dejected with the conscience of evil, heartens us with inward comfort, and speaks peace to the soul in the midst of tumult.

CONTEMPLATION V.—ZIKLAG SPOILED AND REVENGED.

HAD not the king of the Philistines sent David away early, his wives and his people, and substance, which he left at Ziklag, had been utterly lost; now Achish did not more pleasure David in his entertainment, than in his dismission. Saul was not David's enemy more in the persecution of his person, than in the forbearance of God's enemies: behold, thus late doth David feel the smart of Saul's sin in sparing the Amalekites, who, if God's sentence had been duly executed, had not now survived, to annoy this parcel of Israel.

As in spiritual respects our sins are always hurtful to ourselves, so in temporal, oft-times prejudicial to posterity. A wicked man deserves ill of those he never lived to see.

I cannot marvel at the Amalekites' assault made upon the Israelites of Ziklag; I cannot but marvel at their clemency; how just was it, that while David would give aid to the enemies of the church against Israel, the enemies of the church should rise against David, in his peculiar charge of Israel. But while David's roving against the Amalekites, not many days before, left neither man nor woman alive, how strange is it, that the Amalekites, invading and surprising Ziklag, in revenge, kill neither man nor woman! Shall we say that mercy is fled from the breasts of Israelites, and rests in heathens? Or shall we rather ascribe this to the gracious restraint of God, who, having designed Amalek to the slaughter of Israel, and not Israel to the slaughter of Amalek, moved the hands of Israel, and held the hands of Amalek; this was that alone which made the heathens take up with an unbloody revenge, burning only the walls, and leading away the persons. Israel crossed the revealed will of God in sparing Amalek; Amalek fulfils the secret will of God in sparing Israel.

It was still the lot of Amalek to take Israel at all advantages; upon their first coming out of Egypt, when they were weary, weak, and unarmed, then did Amalek assault them. And now, when one part of Israel was in the field against the Philistines, another was gone with the Philistines against Israel; the Amalekites set upon the coasts of both; and go away loaded with the spoil. No other is to be expected of our spiritual adversaries, who are ever readiest to assail when we are the unreadiest to defend.

It was a woeful spectacle for David and his soldiers, upon their return, to find ruins and ashes instead of houses, and instead of their families, solitude; their city was vanished into smoke, their households into captivity; neither could they know whom to accuse, or where to inquire for redress. While they made account that their home should recompense their tedious journey with comfort, the miserable desolation of their home doubles the discomfort of their journey: what remained there but tears and lamentations? They lifted up their voices, and wept till they could weep no more. Here was plenty of nothing but misery and sorrow. The heart of every Israelite was brimful of grief; David's ran over; for besides that his cross was the same with theirs, all this was his alone: each man looked on his fellow as a partner of affliction; but every one looked upon David as the cause of all their affliction; and, as common displeasure is never but fruitful of revenge, they all agree to stone him as the author of their undoing, whom they followed all this while as the hopeful means of their advancements.

Now David's loss is his least grief; neither, as if every thing had conspired to torment him, can he look besides the aggravation of his sorrow and danger. Saul and his soldiers had hunted him out of Israel; the Philistine courtiers had hunted him from the favour of Achish; the Amalekites spoiled him in Ziklag: yet all these are easy adversaries in comparison of his own; his own followers are so far from pitying his participation of the loss that they are ready to kill him, because they are miserable with him. O the many and grievous perplexities of the man after God's own heart! If all his train had joined their best helps for the mitigation of his grief, their cordials had been too weak; but now the vexation, that arises from their fury and malice, drowneth the sense of their loss, and were enough to distract the most resolute heart. Why should it be strange to us that we meet with hard trials, when we see the dear anointed of God thus plunged in evils?

What should the distressed son of Jesse now do? whither should he think to turn him? To go back to Israel he durst not; to go to Achish he might not; to abide among those waste heaps he could not; or, if there might have been harbour in those burnt walls, yet there could be no safety to remain with those mutinous spirits. But David comforted himself in the Lord his God. O happy and sure refuge of a faithful soul! The earth yielded him nothing but matter of disconsolation and heaviness; he lifts his eyes above the hills, whence cometh his salvation. It is no marvel that God remembereth David in all his troubles, since David in all his troubles did thus remember his God: he knew that though no mortal eye of reason or sense could discern any evasion from these intricate evils, yet that the eye of Divine Providence had descried it long before; and that, though no human power could make way for his safety, yet that the over-ruling hand of his God could do it with ease. His experience had assured him of the fidelity of his guardian in heaven; and therefore he comforted himself in the Lord his God.

In vain is comfort expected from God, if we consult not with him. Abiathar the priest is called for; David was not in the court of Achish, without the priest by his side; nor the priest without the ephod; had these been left behind in Ziklag, they had been miscarried with the rest, and David had now been hopeless. How well it succeeds to the great, when they take God with them in his ministers, in his ordinances! As, contrarily, when these are laid by, as superfluous, there can be nothing but uncertainty of success, or certainty of mischief. The presence of the priest and ephod would have little availed him, without their use; by them he asks counsel of the Lord in these straits. The mouth and ears of God, which were shut unto Saul, are open unto David; no sooner can he ask, than he receives answer; and the answer that he receives, is full of courage and comfort; "Follow, for thou shalt surely overtake them, and recover all." That God of truth never disappointed any man's trust. David now finds, that the eye, which waited upon God, was not sent away weeping.

David therefore and his men are now upon their march after the Amalekites. It is no lingering when God bids us go. They who had promised rest to their weary limbs, after their return from Achish, in their harbour of Ziklag, are glad to forget their hopes, and to put their stiff joints upon a new task of motion. It is no marvel, if two hundred of them were so over-tired with their former toil, that they were not able to pass over the river Besor. David was a true type of Christ; we follow him in these holy wars, against the spiritual Amalekites. All of us are not of an equal strength; some are carried by the vigour of their faith, through all difficulties; others, after long pressure, are ready to languish in the way. Our leader is not more strong than pitiful; neither doth he scornfully cashier those whose desires are hearty, while their abilities are unanswerable. How much more should our charity pardon the infirmities of our brethren, and allow them to sit by the stuff, who cannot endure the march!

The same Providence which appointed David to follow the Amalekites, had also ordered an Egyptian to be cast behind them. This cast servant, whom his cruel master had left to faintness and famine, shall be used as the means of the recovery of the Israelites' loss, and of the revenge of the Amalekites. Had not his master neglected him, all these rovers of Amalek had gone away with their life and booty: it is not safe to despise the meanest vassal upon earth. There is a mercy and care due to the most despicable piece of all humanity, wherein we cannot be wanting without the offence, without the punishment of God.

Charity distinguisheth an Israelite from an Amalekite. David's followers are strangers to this Egyptian; an Amalekite was his master; his master leaves him to die in the field of sickness and hunger; these strangers relieved him: and ere they know whether they might, by him, receive any light in their pursuit, they refresh his dying spirits with bread and water, with figs and raisins: neither can the haste of their way be any hinderance to their compassion. He hath no Israelitish blood in him, that is utterly merciless: perhaps yet David's followers might also, in the hope of some intelligence, show kindness to this forlorn Egyptian. Wordly wisdom teacheth us to sow small courtesies where we may reap large harvests of recompense. No sooner are his spirits recalled, than he requites his food with information. I cannot blame the Egyptian, that he was so easily induced to descry these unkind Amalekites to merciful Israelites; those that gave him over unto death, to the restorers of his life; much less that, ere he would descry them, he requires an oath of security from so bad a master. Well doth he match death with such a servitude. Wonderful is the providence of God, even over those that are not in the nearest bonds his own! Three days and three nights had this poor Egyptian slave lain sick and hunger-starved in the fields, and looks for nothing but death, when God sends him succour from the hands of those Israelites whom he had helped to spoil; though not so much for his sake, as for Israel's, is this heathenish straggler preserved.

It pleases God to extend his common favours to all his creatures; but, in miraculous preservations, he hath still wont to have respect to his own. By this means therefore are the Israelites brought to the sight of their late spoilers, whom they find scattered abroad, upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing in triumph, for the great prey they had taken.

It was three days at least since this gainful foraging of Amalek: and now, seeing no fear of any pursuer, and promising themselves safety, in so great and untraced a distance, they make themselves merry with so rich and easy a victory; and now suddenly, when they began to think of enjoying the booty and wealth they had gotten, the sword of David was upon their throats. Destruction is never nearer, than when security hath chased away fear. With how sad faces and hearts had the wives of David, and the other captives of Israel, looked upon the triumphant revels of Amalek; and what a change, do we think appeared in them, when they saw their happy and valiant rescuers flying in upon their insolent victors, and making the death of the Amalekites the ransom of their captivity. They mourned even now at the dances of Amalek; now in the shrieks and death of Amalek, they shout and rejoice. The mercy of our God forgets not to interchange our sorrows with joy, and the joy of the wicked with sorrow.

The Amalekites have paid a dear loan for the goods of Israel, which they now restore with their own lives; and now their spoil hath made David richer than he expected: that booty, which they had swept from all other parts, accrued to him.

Those Israelites, that could not go on to fight for their share, are come to meet their brethren with gratulation. How partial are we wont to be to our own causes! Even very Israelites will be ready to fall out for matter of profit. Where self-love hath bred a quarrel, every man is subject to flatter his own case. It seemed plausible, and but just to the actors in this rescue, that those, which had taken no part in the pain and hazard of the journey, should receive no part of the commodity. It was favour enough for them to recover their wives and children, though they shared not in the goods. Wise and holy David, whose praise was no less to overcome his own in time of peace, than his enemies in war, calls his contending followers from law to equity, and so orders the matter, that, since the plaintiffs were detained, not by will, but by necessity, and since their forced stay was useful in guarding the stuff, they should partake equally of the prey with their fellows: a sentence well beseeming the justice of God's anointed. Those that represent God upon earth, should resemble him in their proceedings. It is the just mercy of our God to measure us by our wills, not by our abilities; to recompense us graciously, according to the truth of our desires and endeavours; and to account that performed by us, which he only letteth us from performing. It were wide with us, if sometimes purpose did not supply actions. While our heart faulteth not, we that, through spiritual sickness, are fain to bide by the stuff, shall share both in grace and glory with the victors.

CONTEMPLATION VI.—THE DEATH OF SAUL.

THE witch of Endor had half slain Saul before the battle: it is just that they who consult with devils should go away with discomfort. He hath eaten his last bread at the hand of a sorceress; and now necessity draws him into that field, where he sees nothing but despair. Had not Saul believed the ill news of the counterfeit Samuel, he had not been struck down on the ground with words; now his belief made him desperate. Those actions, which are not sustained by hope, must needs languish, and are only promoted by outward compulsion: while the mind is uncertain of success, it relieves itself with the possibilities of good. In doubts there is a comfortable mixture; but, when it is assured of the worst event, it is utterly discouraged and dejected. It hath therefore pleased the wisdom of God to hide from wicked men his determination of their final estate, that the remainders of hope may hearten them to good.

In all likelihood, one self-same day saw David a victor over the Amalekites, and Saul discomfited by the Philistines: how should it be otherwise? David consulted with God, and prevailed; Saul with the witch of Endor, and perisheth. The end is commonly answerable to the way: it is an idle injustice, when we do ill, to look to speed well. The slaughter of Saul and his sons was not in the first scene of this tragical field: that was rather reserved by God for the last act, that Saul's measure might be full. God is long ere he strikes, but when he doth, it is to purpose. First, Israel flies and falls down wounded in mount Gilboa: they had their part in Saul's sin; they were actors in David's persecution; justly therefore do they suffer with him whom they had seconded in offence. As it is hard to be good under an evil prince, so it is as rare not to be enwrapped in his judgments. It was no small addition to the anguish of Saul's death, to see his sons dead, to see his people flying, and slain before him; they had sinned in their king, and in them is their king punished. The rest were not so worthy of pity; but whose heart would it not touch to see Jonathan, the good son of a wicked father, involved in the common destruction? Death is not partial: all dispositions, all merits are alike to it. If valour, if holiness, if sincerity of heart could have been any defence against mortality, Jonathan had survived. Now, by their wounds and death, no man can discern which is Jonathan; the soul only finds the difference which the body admitteth not. Death is the common gate both to heaven and hell; we all pass that, ere our turning to either hand. The sword of the Philistines fetcheth Jonathan through it with his fellows; no sooner is his foot over that threshold, than God conducteth him to glory. The best cannot be happy but through their dissolution; now therefore hath Jonathan no cause of complaint; he is, by the rude and cruel hand of a Philistine, but removed to a better kingdom than he leaves to his brother: and at once is his death both a temporal affliction to the son of Saul, and an entrance of glory to the friend of David.

The Philistine archers shot at random; God directs their arows into the body of Saul. Lest the discomfiture of his people, and the slaughter of his sons, should not be grief enough to him, he feels himself wounded, and sees nothing before him but horror and death; and now, as a man forsaken of all hopes, he begs of his armour-bearer that death's blow, which else he must to the doubling of his indignation, receive from a Philistine. He begs this bloody favour of his servant, and is denied. Such an awfulness hath God placed in sovereignty, that no entreaty, no extremity, can move the hand against it. What metal are those men made of, that can suggest or resolve, and attempt the violation of majesty? Wicked men care more for the shame of the world than the danger of their souls. Desperate Saul will now supply his armour-bearer; and as a man that bore arms against himself, he falls upon his own sword. What if he had died by the weapon of a Philistine? so did his son Jonathan, and lost no glory; these conceits of disreputation prevail with carnal hearts, above all spiritual respects. There is no greater murderer than vain glory. Nothing more argues a heart void of grace, than to be transported by idle popularity into actions prejudicial to the soul.

Evil examples, especially of the great, never escaped imitation; the armour-bearer of Saul follows his master, and dares do that to himself, which to his king he durst not; as if their own swords had been more familiar executioners, they yielded unto them what they grudged to their pursuers. From the beginning was Saul ever his own enemy, neither did any hands hurt him but his own; and now his death is suitable to his life: his own hand pays him the reward of all his wickedness. The end of hypocrites and envious men is commonly fearful. Now is the blood of God's priests, which Saul shed, and of David, which he would have shed, required and requited. The evil spirit had said the evening before, "To-morrow thou shalt be with me;" and now Saul hasteth to make the devil no liar; rather than fail, he gives himself his own mittimus. O the woeful extremities of a despairing soul, plunging him ever into a greater mischief to avoid the less! He might have been a patient in another's violence, and faultless; now, while he will needs act the Philistine's part upon himself, he lived and died a murderer: the case is deadly, when the prisoner breaks the jail, and will not stay for his delivery; and though we may not pass sentence upon such a soul, yet upon the fact we may; the soul may possibly repent in the parting; the act is heinous, and such as, without repentance, kills the soul.

It was the next day, ere the Philistines knew how much they were victors; then, finding the dead corpse of Saul and his sons, they begin their triumphs. The head of king Saul is cut off in lieu of Goliah's, and now all their idol temples ring of their success. Foolish Philistines! if they had not been more beholden to Saul's sins than their gods, they had never carried away the honour of those trophies; instead of magnifying the justice of the true God, who punished Saul with deserved death, they magnify the power of the false: superstition is extremely injurious to God. It is no better than theft to ascribe unto the second causes that honour which is due unto the first; but to give God's glory to those things which neither act, nor are, it is the highest degree of spiritual robbery.

Saul was none of the best kings; yet so impatient are his subjects of the indignity offered to his dead corpse, that they will rather leave their own bones amongst the Philistines, than the carcass of Saul. Such a close relation there is betwixt a prince and subject, that the dishonour of either is inseparable from both. How willing should we be to hazard our bodies or substance for the vindication either of the person or name of a good king, while he lives to the benefit of our protection! It is an unjust ingratitude in those men which can endure the disgrace of them, under whose shelter they live; but how unnatural is the villany of those miscreants, that can be content to be actors in the capital wrongs offered to sovereign authority!

It were a wonder, if, after the death of a prince, there should want some pickthank to insinuate himself into his successor. An Amalekite young man rides post to Ziklag to find out David, whom even common rumour had notified for the anointed heir to the kingdom of Israel, to be the first messenger of that news, which he thought could be no other than acceptable, the death of Saul; and, that the tidings might be so much more meritorious, he adds to the report what he thinks might carry the greatest retribution. In hope of reward or honour, the man is content to belie himself to David: it was not the spear, but the sword of Saul, that was the instrument of his death; neither could this stranger find Saul, but dying, since the armour-bearer of Saul saw him dead ere he offered that violence to himself: the hand of this Amalekite therefore was not guilty, his tongue was. Had not this messenger measured David's foot by his own last, he had forborne this piece of the news, and not hoped to advantage himself by this falsehood. Now he thinks the tidings of a kingdom cannot but please; none but Saul and Jonathan stood in David's way: he cannot choose but like to hear of their removal; especially since Saul did so tyrannously persecute his innocence. If I shall only report the fact done by another, I shall go away but with the recompense of a lucky post; whereas, if I take upon me the action, I am the man to whom David is beholden for the kingdom; he cannot but honour and requite me as the author of his deliverance and happiness. Worldly minds think no man can be of any other than their own diet; and because they find the respects of self-love and private profit, so strongly prevailing with themselves, they cannot conceive how these should be capable of a repulse from others.

How much was this Amalekite mocked of his hopes! While he imagined that David would now triumph and feast in the assured expectation of the kingdom, and possession of the crown of Israel, he finds him rending his clothes, and wringing his hands, and weeping and mourning as if all his comfort had been dead with Saul and Jonathan: and yet perhaps he thought, This sorrow of David is but fashionable, such as great heirs make show of in the fatal day they have longed for: these tears will be soon dry; the sight of a crown will soon breed a succession of other passions: but this error is soon corrected; for when David had entertained this bearer with a sad fast all the day, he calls him forth in the evening to execution. "How, wast thou not afraid, saith he, to put forth thy hand to destroy the anointed of the Lord?" Doubtless the Amalekite made many fair pleas for himself, out of the grounds of his own report. Alas! Saul was before fallen upon his own spear: it was but mercy to kill him that was half dead, that he might die the shorter; besides, his entreaty and importunate prayers moved me to hasten him through those painful gates of death; had I stricken him as an enemy, I had deserved the blow I had given; now I lent him the hand of a friend; why am I punished for obeying the voice of a king, and for perfecting what himself had begun, and could not finish? And if neither his own wound, nor mine, had despatched him, the Philistines were at his heels, ready to do this same act with insultation, which I did in favour; and if my hand had not prevented him, where had been the crown of Israel, which I now have here presented to thee? I could have delivered that to king Achish, and have been rewarded with honour: let me not die for an act well meant to thee, however construed by thee. But no pretence can make his own tale not deadly: "Thy blood be upon thine own head, for thine own mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed." It is a just supposition, that every man is so great a favourer of himself, that he will not misreport his own actions, nor say the worst of himself. In matter of confession, men may, without injury, be taken at their words: if he did it, his fact was capital;

if he did it not, his lie. It is pity any other recompense should befall those false flatterers, that can be content to father a sin to get thanks. Every drop of royal blood is sacred; for a man to say that he hath shed it, is mortal. Of how far different spirits from this of David, are those men which suborn the death of princes, and celebrate and canonize the murderers! "Into their secret, let not my soul come; my glory, be not thou joined to their assembly."

CONTEMPLATION VII.—ABNER AND JOAB.

How merciful and seasonable are the provisions of God! Ziklag was now nothing but ruins and ashes: David might return to the soil where it stood, to the roofs and walls he could not; no sooner is he disappointed of that harbour, than God provides him cities of Hebron: Saul shall die to give him elbow-room. Now doth David find the comfort that his extremity sought in the Lord his God. Now are his clouds for a time passed over, and the sun breaks gloriously forth: David shall reign after his sufferings. So shall we, if we endure to the end, find a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give us at that day. But though David well knew that his head was long before anointed, and had heard Saul himself confidently avouching his succession, yet he will not stir from the heaps of Ziklag, till he has consulted with the Lord. It did not content him, that he had God's warrant for the kingdom, but he must have his instructions for the taking possession of it. How safe and happy is the man that is resolved to do nothing without God! Neither will generalities of direction be sufficient; even particular circumstances must look for a word; still is God a pillar of fire and cloud to the eye of every Israelite: neither may there be any motion or stay but from him; that action cannot but succeed, which proceeds upon so sure a warrant.

God sends him to Hebron, a city of Judah; neither will David go up thither alone, but he takes with him all his men, with their whole households: they shall take such part as himself; as they had shared with him in his misery, so they shall now in his prosperity; neither doth he take advantage of their late mutiny, which was yet fresh and green, to cashier those unthankful and ungracious followers; but pardoning their secret rebellions, he makes them partakers of his good success. Thus doth our heavenly leader, whom David prefigured, take us to reign with him who have suffered with him. Passing by our manifold infirmities, as if they had not been, he removeth us from the land of our banishment, and the ashes of our forlorn Ziklag, to the Hebron of our peace and glory: the expectation of this day must, as it did with David's soldiers, digest all our sorrows.

Never any calling of God was so conspicuous, as not to find some opposites. What Israelite did not know David appointed by God to the succession of the kingdom? Even the Amalekite could carry the crown to him as the true owner: yet there wants not an Abner to resist him, and the title of an Ishbosheth to colour his resistance. If any of Saul's house could have made challenge to the crown, it should have been Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, who, it seems, had too much of his father's blood to be a competitor with David: the question is not, who may claim the most right, but who may best serve the faction: neither was Ishbosheth any other than Abner's stall. Saul could not have a fitter courtier; whether in the imitation of his master's envy, or the ambition of ruling under a borrowed name, he strongly opposed David. There are those who strive against their own hearts, to make a side with whom conscience is oppressed by affection. An ill quarrel once undertaken shall be maintained, although with blood: now, not so much the blood of Saul, as the engagement of Abner makes the war. The sons of Zeruiah stand fast to David. It is much how a man placeth his first interest: if Abner had been in Joab's room, when Saul's displeasure drove David from the court, or Joab in Abner's, these actions, these events had been changed with the persons: it was the only happiness of Joab that he fell on the better side.

Both the commanders under David and Ishbosheth were equally cruel: both are so inured to blood, that they make but a sport of killing. Custom makes sin so familiar, that the horror of it is to some turned into pleasure. "Come, let the young men play before us." Abner is the challenger, and speeds thereafter: for though, in the matches of duel, both sides miscarried, yet, in the following conflict, Abner and his men are beaten: by the success of those single combats no man knows the better of the cause: both sides perish, to show how little God liked either the offer or the acceptation of such a trial: but, when both did their best, God punisheth the wrong part with discomfiture.

O the misery of civil dissension! Israel and Judah were brethren; one carried the name of the father, the other of the son. Judah was but a branch of Israel: Israel was the root of Judah: yet Israel and Judah must fight, and kill each other, only upon the quarrel of an ill leader's ambition. The speed of Asahel was not greater than his courage. It was a mind fit for one of David's worthies, to strike at the head, to match himself with the best. He was both swift and strong; but "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." If he had gone never so slowly, he might have overtaken death: now he runs to fetch it. So little lust had Abner to shed the blood of a son of Zeruiah, that he twice advises him to retreat from pursuing his own peril. Asahel's cause was so much better as Abner's success. Many a one miscarries in the rash prosecution of a good quarrel, when the abettors of the worst part go away with victory. Heat of zeal, sometimes in the undiscreet pursuit of a just adversary, proves mortal to the agent, prejudicial to the service.

Abner, while he kills, yet he flies, and runs away from his own death, while he inflicts it upon another. David's followers had the better of the field and day. The sun, as unwilling to see any more Israelitish blood shed by brethren, hath withdrawn himself: and now both parts, having got the advantage of a hill under them, have safe convenience of parley: Abner begins, and persuades Joab to surcease the fight; "Shall the sword devour for ever? Knowest thou not, that it will be bitterness in the end? How long shall it be ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?" It was his fault that the sword devoured at all; and why was not the beginning of a civil war bitterness? Why did he call forth the people to skirmish, and invite them to death? Had Abner been on the winning hand, this motion had been thank-worthy. It was a noble disposition in a victor, to call for a cessation of arms: whereas necessity wrings this suit from the over-mastered. There cannot be a greater praise to a valiant and wise commander, than a propension to all just terms of peace; for war, as it is sometimes necessary, so it is always evil; and if fighting have any other end proposed besides peace, it proves murder. Abner shall find himself no less overcome by Joab in clemency, than power: he says not, I will not so easily leave the advantage of my victory; since the dice of war run on my side, I will follow the chance of my good success: thou shouldest have considered of this before thy provocation: it is now too late to move unto forbearance. But, as a man that meant to approve himself equally free from cowardice in the beginning of the conflict, and from cruelty in the end, he professeth his forwardness to entertain any pretence of sheathing up the swords of Israel; and swears to Abner, that if it had not been for his proud irritation, the people had in the morning before ceased from that bloody pursuit of their brethren. As it becomes public persons to be lovers of peace, so they must show it upon all good occasions; letting pass no opportunity of making spare of blood.

Ishbosheth was, it seems, a man of no great spirits; for being no less than forty years old when his father went into his last field against the Philistines, he was content to stay at home. Abner hath put ambition into him; and hath easily raised him to the head of a faction, against the anointed prince of God's people. If this usurped crown of Saul's son had any worth or glory in it, he cannot but acknowledge to owe it all unto Abner; yet how forward is unthankful Ishbosheth to receive a false suggestion against his chief abettor: "Wherefore hast thou gone into my father's concubine?" He that made no conscience of an unjust claim to the crown, and a maintenance of it with blood, yet seems scrupulous of a less sin, that carried in it the colour of a disgrace: the touch of her, who had been honoured by his father's bed, seemed an intolerable presumption, and such as could not be severed from his own dishonour. Self-love sometimes borrows the face of honest zeal. Those, who out of true grounds, dislike sins, do hate them all indifferently, according to their heinousness; hypocrites are partial in their detestation, bewraying ever most bitterness against those offences, which may most prejudice their persons and reputations.

It is as dangerous as unjust for princes to give both their ears and their heart to misgrounded humours of their innocent followers. This wrong hath stripped Ishbosheth of the kingdom. Abner in the mean time cannot be excused from a treacherous inconstancy: if Saul's son had no true title to the crown, why did he maintain it? if he had, why did he forsake the cause and person? Had Abner, out of remorse, for furthering a false claim, taken off his hand, I know not wherein he could be blamed, except for not doing it sooner; but now to withdraw his professed allegiance, upon a private revenge, was to take a lewd leave of an ill action. If Ishbosheth were his lawful prince, no injury could warrant a revolt. Even betwixt private persons, a return of wrongs is both uncharitable and unjust, however this go current for the common justice of the world; how much more should we learn, from a supreme hand, to take hard measures with thanks! It had been Abner's duty, to have given his king a peaceable and humble satisfaction, and not to fly out in a snuff. "If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences." Now, his impatient falling, although to the right side, makes him no better than traitorously honest.

So soon as Abner hath entertained a resolution of his rebellion, he persuades the elders of Israel to accompany him in the change; and whence doth he fetch his main motive, but from the oracle of God? "The Lord hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David will I save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies." Abner knew this full well before, yet then was well content to smother a known truth for his own turn, and now, that the publication of it may serve for his advantage, he wins the heart of Israel, by showing God's charter for him whom he had so long opposed. Hypocrites make use of God for their own purposes, and care only to make divine authority a colour for their own designs. No man ever heard Abner godly till now; neither had he been so at this time, if he had not intended a revengeful departure from Ishbosheth. Nothing is more odious, than to make religion a stalking-horse to policy.

Who can but glorify God in his justice, when he sees the bitter end of this treacherous dissimulation? David may, upon considerations of state, entertain his new guest with a feast; and well might he seem to deserve a welcome, that undertakes to bring all Israel to the league and homage of David; but God never meant to use so unworthy means for so good a work. Joab returns from pursuing a troop, and finding Abner dismissed in peace, and expectation of a beneficial return, follows him, and whether out of envy at a new rival of honour, or out of the revenge of Asahel, he repays him both dissimulation and death. God doth most justly by Joab, that which Joab did for himself most unjustly; I know not, setting the quarrel aside, whether we can worthily blame Abner for the death of Asahel, who would needs, after fair warnings, run himself upon Abner's spear; yet this fact shall procure his payment for worse. Now is Ishbosheth's wrong revenged by an enemy. We may not always measure the justice of God's proceedings by present occasions: he needs not make us acquainted, or ask us leave, when he will call for the arrearages of forgotten sins.

BOOK XV.

CONTEMPLATION I.—UZZAH, AND THE ARK REMOVED

THE house of Saul is quiet, the Philistines beaten; victory cannot end better than in devotion: David is no sooner settled in his house at Jerusalem, than he fetcheth God to be his guest there; the thousands of Israel go now, in a holy march, to bring up the ark of God to the place of his rest. The tumults of war afforded no opportunity of this service; only peace is a friend to religion: neither is peace ever our friend but when it is a servant of piety. The use of war is not more pernicious to the body, than the abuse of peace is to the soul: alas! the riot, bred of our long ease, rather drives the ark of God from us; so the still sedentary life is subject to diseases, and standing waters putrify. It may be just with God to take away the blessing, which we do so much abuse, and to scour off our rust with bloody war, &c.

The ark of God had now many years rested in the obscure lodge of Abinadab, without the honour of a tabernacle. David will not endure himself glorious, and the ark of God contemptible; his first care is to provide a fit room for God in the head of the tribes, in his own city. The chief care of good princes must be the advancement of religion; what should the deputies of God rather do, than honour him whom they represent! It was no good that Israel could learn of Philistines; those Pagans had sent the ark back in a new cart; the Israelites saw God blessed that conduct, and now they practise it at home: but that which God will take from Philistines, he will not brook from Israel. Aliens from God are no fit patterns for children. Divine institution had made this a carriage for the Levites, not for oxen: neither should those sons of Abinadab have driven the cart, but carried that sacred burden. God's businesses must be done after his own forms, which if we do, with the best intentions, alter, we presume.

It is long since Israel saw so fair a day as this, wherein they went, in this holy triumph, to fetch the ark of God: now their warlike trumpets are turned into harps and timbrels; and their hands, instead of wielding the sword and spear, strike upon those musical strings, whereby they might express the joy of their hearts; here was no noise but of mirth, no motion but pleasant. O happy Israel, that had a God to rejoice in, that had this occasion of rejoicing in their God, and a heart that embraced this occasion! There is nothing but this wherein we may not joy immoderately, unseasonably; this spiritual joy can never be either out of time, or out of measure. "Let him that rejoiceth, rejoice in the Lord." But now, when the Israelites were in the midst of this angel-like jollity, their hearts lifted up, their hands playing, their feet moving, their tongues singing and shouting, God sees good to strike them into a sudden dump by the death of Uzzah. They are scarce set into the tune, when God mars their music, by a fearful judgment, and changes their mirth into astonishment and confusion: there could not be a more excellent work than this they were about; there could not be more cheerful hearts in the performing of it: yet will the most holy God rather dash all this solemn service, than endure an act of presumption or infidelity. Abinadab had been the faithful host of God's ark for the space of twenty years: even in the midst of the terrors of Israel, who were justly affrighted with the vengeance inflicted upon Bethshemesh, did he give harbour unto it; yet even the son of Abinadab is stricken dead, in the first departing of that blessed guest. The sanctity of the parent cannot bear out the sin of his son. The Holy One of Israel will be sanctified in all that come near him; he will be served like himself.

What then was the sin of Uzzah? what was the capital crime for which he so fearfully perished? That the ark of God was committed to the cart, it was not his device only, but the common act of many; that it was not carried on the shoulders of the Levites, was no less the fault of Ahio, and the rest of their brethren. Only Uzzah is stricken: the rest sinned in negligence, he in presumption; the ark of God shakes with the agitation of that carriage, he puts forth his hand to hold it steady; human judgment would have found herein nothing heinous. God sees not with the eyes of men; none but the priests should have dared to touch the ark; it was enough for the Levites to touch the bars that carried it; an unwarranted hand cannot so lightly touch the ark, but he strikes the God that dwells in it. No marvel, if God strike that man with death, that strikes him with presumption; there was well near the same quarrel against the thousands of Bethshemesh, and against Uzzah; they died for looking into the ark, he for touching it; lest Israel should grow into a contemptuous familiarity with this testimony of God's presence, he will hold them in awe with judgments. The revenging hand of the Almighty, that, upon the return of the ark, staid at the house of Abinadab, upon the remove of the ark, begins there again. Where are those that think God will take up with a careless and slubbered service? He whose infinite mercy uses to pass by our sins of infirmity, punisheth yet severely our bold faults. If we cannot do any thing in the degrees that he requireth, yet we must learn to do all things in the form that he requireth: doubtless Uzzah meant no otherwise than well, in putting forth his hand to stay the ark; he knew the sacred utensils that were in it, the pot of manna, the tables of the law, the rod of Aaron which might be wronged by that over-rough motion; to these he offers his aid, and is stricken dead; the best intention cannot excuse, much less warrant us in unlawful actions. Where we do ought in faith, it pleases our good God to wink at, and pity our weaknesses: but if we dare to present God with the well-meant services of our own making, we run into the indignation of God. There is nothing more dangerous than to be our own carvers in matters of devotion.

I marvel not, if the countenance of David were suddenly changed, to see the pale face of death in one of the chief actors in this holy procession. He, that had found God so favourable to him in actions of less worth, is troubled to see this success of a business so heartily directed unto his God: and now he begins to look through Uzzah at himself, and to say, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" Then only shall we make a right use of the judgments of God upon others, when we shall fear them in ourselves, and, finding our sins at least equal, shall tremble in the expectation of the same deserved punishments. God intends not only revenge in his execution, but reformation; as good princes regard not so much the smart of the evil past, as the prevention of the future, which is never attained, but when we make applications of God's hand. and draw common causes out of God's particular proceedings.

I do not hear David say, Surely this man is guilty of some secret sin that the world knows not; God hath met with him, there is no danger to us; why should I be discouraged to see God just? We may go on safely and prosper. But here his foot stays, and his hand falls from his instrument, and his tongue is ready to tax his own unworthiness; "How shall the ark of the Lord come unto me?" That heart is carnal and proud that thinks any man worse than himself. David's fear stays his progress; perhaps he might have proceeded with good success, but he dares not venture, where he sees such a deadly check. It is better to be too fearful than too forward, in those affairs which do immediately concern God. As it is not good to refrain from holy businesses, so it is worse to do them ill; awfulness is a safe interpreter of God's secret actions, and a wise guide of ours.

This event hath holpen Obed-Edom to a guest he looked not for; God shall now sojourn in the house of him, in whose heart he dwelt before by a strong faith, else the man durst not have undertaken to receive that dreadful ark, which David himself feared to harbour. O the courage of an honest and faithful heart! Obed-Edom knew well enough, what slaughter the ark had made among the Philistines, and after that among the Bethshemites, and now he saw Uzzah lie dead before him; yet doth he not make any scruple of entertaining it; neither doth he say, My neighbour Abinadab was a careful and religious host to the ark, and is now paid with the blood of his son; how shall I hope to speed better? but he opens his doors with a bold cheerfulness, and, notwithstanding all those terrors, bids God welcome. Nothing can make God not amiable to his own; even his very justice is lovely. Holy men know how to rejoice in the Lord with trembling, and can fear without discouragement.

The God of heaven will not receive any thing from men on free cost; he will pay liberally for his lodging, a plentiful blessing upon Obed-Edom, and all his household. It was an honour to that zealous Gittite, that the ark should come under his roof; yet God rewards that honour with benediction: never man was a loser by true godliness. The house of Obed-Edom cannot this while want observation; the eyes of David and all Israel were never off from it, to see how it fared with this entertainment. And now, when they find nothing but a gracious acceptation and sensible blessing, the good king of Israel takes new heart, and hastens to fetch the ark into his royal city. The view of God's favours upon the godly, is no small encouragement to confidence and obedience. Doubtless, Obed-Edom was not free from some weaknesses; if the Lord should have taken the advantage of judgment against him, what Israellites had not been disheartened from attending the ark? Now David and Israel were not more affrighted with the vengeance upon Uzzah, than encouraged by the blessing of Obed-Edom. The wise God doth so order his just and merciful proceedings, that the awfulness of men may be tempered with love. Now the sweet singer of Israel revives his holy music, and adds both more spirit and more pomp to so devout a business. I did not before hear of trumpets, nor dancing, nor shouting, nor sacrifice, nor the linen ephod. The sense of God's past displeasure doubles our care to please him, and our joy in his recovered approbation; we never make so much of our health as after sickness, nor never are so officious to our friend as after an unkindness. In the first setting out of the ark, David's fear was at least an equal match to his joy; therefore, after the first six paces, he offered a sacrifice, both to pacify God and thank him: but now, when they saw no sign of dislike, they did more freely let themselves loose to a fearless joy, and the body strove to express the holy affection of the soul; there was no limb, no part that did not profess their mirth by motion, no noise of voice or instrument wanted to assist their spiritual jollity: David led the way, dancing with all his might in his linen ephod. Uzzah was still in his eye, he durst not usurp upon a garment of priests, but will borrow their colour to grace the solemnity, though he dare not the fashion. White was ever the colour of joy, and linen was light for use: therefore he covers his princely robes with white linen, and means to honour himself by his conformity to God's ministers. Those that think there is disgrace in the ephod, are far from the spirit of the man after God's own heart: neither can there be a greater argument of a foul soul, than a dislike of the glorious calling of God. Barren Michal hath too many sons that scorn the holy habit and exercises. She looks through her window, and, seeing the attire and gestures of her devout husband, despiseth him in her heart: neither can she conceal her contempt, but, like Saul's daughter, casts it proudly in his face; "O how glorious was the king of Israel this day, which was uncovered this day in the eyes of the maidens of his servants, as a fool uncovereth himself!" Worldly hearts can see nothing in actions of zeal, but folly and madness. Piety hath no relish to their palate, but distasteful.

David's heart did never swell so much at any reproach, as this of his wife; his love was for the time lost in his anger; and, as a man impatient of no affront so much as in the way of his devotion, he returns a bitter check to his Michal: "It was before the Lord, which chose me, rather than thy father, and all his house," &c. Had not Michal twitted her husband with the shame of his zeal, she had not heard of the shameful rejection of her father: now, since she will be forgetting whose wife she was, she shall be put in mind whose daughter she was. Contumelies, that are cast upon us in the causes of God, may safely be repaid. If we be meal-mouthed in the scorns of religion, we are not patient, but zealless; here we may not forbear her that lies in our bosom. If David had not loved Michal dearly, he had never stood upon those points with Abner; he knew, that if Abner came to him, the kingdom of Israel would accompany him; and yet he sends him the charge of not seeing his face, except he brought Michal, Saul's daughter, with him; as if he would not regard the crown of Israel, while he wanted that wife of his: yet here he takes her up roundly, as if she had been an enemy, not a partner of his bed. All relations are aloof off, in comparison of that betwixt God and the soul. "He that loves father, or mother, or wife, or child, better than me, (saith our Saviour,) is not worthy of me." Even the highest delights of our hearts must be trampled upon, when they will stand out in rivalry with God. O happy resolution of the royal prophet, and prophetical king of Israel! "I will be yet more vile than thus, and will be low in mine own sight." He knew this very abasement heroical; and that the only way to true glory, is not to be ashamed of our lowest humiliation unto God. Well might he promise himself honour, from those whose contempt she had threatened. The hearts of men are not their own; he that made them overrules them, and inclines them to an honourable conceit of those that honour their Maker; so as holy men have ofttimes inward reverence, even where they have outward indignities. David came to bless his house, Michal brings a curse upon herself; her scorns shall make her childless to the day of her death. Barrenness was held in those times none of the least judgments. God doth so revenge David's quarrel upon Michal, that her sudden disgrace shall be recompensed with perpetual: she shall not be held worthy to bear a son to him whom she unjustly contemned. How just is it with God to provide whips for the backs of scorners! It is no marvel, if those that mock at goodness be plagued with continual fruitlessness.

CONTEMPLATION II.—MEPHIBOSHETH AND ZIBA.

So soon as ever David can but breathe himself from the public cares, he casts back his thoughts to the dear remembrance of his Jonathan. Saul's servant is likely to give him the best intelligence of Saul's sons: the question is therefore moved to Ziba, "Remaineth there none of the house of Saul?" And, lest suspicion might conceal the remainders of an emulous line, in fear of revenge intended, he adds, "On whom I may show the mercy of God for Jonathan's sake?" O friendship worthy of the monuments of eternity; fit only to requite him whose love was more than the love of women! He doth not say, Is there any of the house of Jonathan,—but of Saul; that, for his friend's sake, he may show favour to the posterity of his persecutor. Jonathan's love could not be greater than Saul's malice, which also survived long in his issue, from whom David found a busy and stubborn rivality for the crown of Israel: yet, as one that gladly buried all the hostility of Saul's house in Jonathan's grave, he asks, "Is there any man left of Saul's house, that I may show him mercy for Jonathan's sake?" It is true love, that, over-living the person of a friend, will be inherited of his seed; but to love the posterity of an enemy in a friend, it is a miracle of friendship. The formal amity of the world is confined to a face, or to the possibility of recompense languishing in the disability, and dying in the decease of the party affected. That love was ever false that is not ever constant, and the most operative when it cannot be either known or requited.

To cut off all unquiet competition for the kingdom of Israel, the providence of God had so ordered, that there is none left of the house of Saul, besides the sons of his concubines, save only young and lame Mephibosheth; so young, that he was but five years of age, when David entered upon the government of Israel; so lame, that, if his age had fitted, his impotency had made him unfit for the throne. Mephibosheth was not born a cripple, it was a heedless nurse that made him so. She, hearing of the death of Saul and Jonathan, made such haste to fly, that her young master was lamed with the fall. Certainly there needed no such speed to run away from David, whose love pursues the hidden son of his brother Jonathan. How often doth our ignorant mistaking, cause us to run from our best friends, and to catch knocks and maims of them that profess our protection!

Mephibosheth could not come otherwise than fearfully into the presence of David, whom he knew so long, so spitefully opposed by the house of Saul. He could not be ignorant that the fashion of the world is to build their own security upon the blood of the opposite faction; neither to think themselves safe, while any branch remains springing out of that root of their emulation. Seasonably doth David therefore first expel all those unjust doubts, ere he administer his further cordials; "Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and and will restore thee all the fields of Saul thy father, and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually."

David can see neither Saul's blood, nor lame legs in Mephibosheth, while he sees in him the features of his friend Jonathan: how much less shall the God of mercies regard our infirmities, or the corrupt blood of our sinful progenitors, while he beholds us in the face of his Son, in whom he is well pleased!

Favours are wont so much more to affect us, as they are less expected by us. Mephibosheth, as overjoyed with so comfortable a word, and confounded in himself at the remembrance of the contrary deservings of his family, bows himself to the earth, and says, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?" I find no defect of wit, though of limbs, in Mephibosheth; he knew himself the grandchild of the king of Israel, the son of Jonathan, the lawful heir of both; yet in regard of his own impotency, and the trespass and rejection of his house, he thus abaseth himself unto David. Humiliation is a right use of God's affliction. What if he was born great? If the sin of his grandfather hath lost his estate, and the hand of the nurse hath deformed and disabled his person, he now forgets what he was, and calls himself worse than he is, "a dog." Yet, "a living dog is better than a dead lion." There is dignity and comfort in life; Mephibosheth is therefore a dead dog unto David. It is not for us to nourish the same spirits in our adverse estate, that we found in our highest prosperity. What use have we made of God's hand, if we be not the lower with our fall? God intends we should carry our cross, not make a fire of it to warm us: it is no bearing up our sails in a tempest. Good David cannot disesteem Mephibosheth ever the more for disparaging himself; he loves and honours this humility in the son of Jonathan. There is no more certain way to glory and advancement, than a lowly dejection of ourselves. He that made himself a dog, and therefore fit only to lie under the table, yea a dead dog, and therefore fit only for the ditch, is raised up to the table of a king; his seat shall be honourable, yea royal, his fare delicious, his attendance noble. How much more will our gracious God lift up our heads unto true honour before men and angels, if we can be sincerely humbled in his sight! If we miscall ourselves in the meanness of our conceits to him, he gives us a new name, and sets us at the table of his glory. It is contrary with God and men; if they reckon of us as we set ourselves, he values us according to our abasements. Like a prince truly munificent and faithful, David promises and performs at once: Ziba, Saul's servant, hath the charge given him of the execution of that royal word: "He shall be the bailiff of this great husbandry of his master Mephibosheth." The land of Saul, however forfeited, shall know no other master than Saul's grandchild. As yet, Saul's servant had sped better than his son. I read of twenty servants of Ziba, none of Mephibosheth. Earthly possessions do not always admit of equal divisions. The wheel is now turned up, Mephibosheth is a prince, Ziba is his officer. I cannot but pity the condition of this good son of Jonathan: into ill hands did honest Mephibosheth fall, first of a careless nurse, then of a treacherous servant; she maimed his body, he would have overthrown his estate. After some years of eye-service to Mephibosheth, wicked Ziba intends to give him a worse fall than his nurse. Never any court was free from detractors, from delators, who, if they see a man to be a cripple, that he cannot go to speak for himself, will be telling tales of him in the ears of the great: such a one was this perfidious Ziba, who, taking the opportunity of David's flight from his son Absalom, follows him with a fair present, and a false tale, accusing his impotent master of a foul and traitorous ingratitude, labouring to tread upon his lame lord, to raise himself to honour. True-hearted Mephibosheth had as good a will as the best; if he could have commanded legs, he had not been left behind David: now, that he cannot go with him, he will not be well without him, and therefore puts himself to a wilful and sullen penance, for the absence and danger of his king; he will not so much as put on clean clothes for the time, as he that could not have any joy in himself for the want of his lord David. Unconscionable miscreants care not how they collogue, whom they slander for a private advantage. Lewd Ziba comes with a gift in his hand, and a smooth tale in his mouth: O Sir, you thought you had a Jonathan at home, but you will find a Saul; it were pity but he should be set at your table, that would sit in your throne! You thought Saul's land would have contented Mephibosheth, but he would have all yours; though he be lame, yet he would be climbing: would you have thought that this cripple could be plotting for your kingdom, now that you are gone aside? Ishbosheth will never die while Mephibosheth lives. How did he now forget his impotence, and raised up his spirits in hope of a day; and durst say, that now the time was come, wherein the crown should revert to Saul's true heir. O viper! if a serpent bite in secret when he is not charmed, no better is a slanderer. Honest Mephibosheth, in good manners, made a dead dog of himself, when David offered him the favour of his board; but Ziba would make him a very dog indeed, an ill-natured cur, that, when David did thus kindly feed him at his own table, would not only bite his fingers, but fly at his throat.

But what shall we say to this? Neither earthly sovereignty, nor holiness, can exempt men from human infirmity. Wise and good David hath now but one ear, and that misled with credulity. His charity in believing Ziba, makes him uncharitable in distrusting, in censuring Mephibosheth. The detractor hath not only sudden credit given him, but Saul's land. Jonathan's son hath lost (unheard) that inheritance which was given him unsought. Hearsay is no safe ground of any judgment; Ziba slanders, David believes, Mephibosheth suffers.

Lies shall not always prosper: God will not abide the truth to be ever oppressed. At last Jonathan's lame son shall be found as sound in heart as lame in his body; he, whose soul was like his father Jonathan's soul, whose body was like to his grandfather Saul's soul, meets David, as it was high time, upon his return, bestirs his tongue to discharge himself of so foul a slander; the more horrible the crime had been, the more villanous was the unjust suggestion of it, and the more necessary was a just apology; sweetly therefore, and yet passionately, doth he labour to greaten David's favours to him, his own obligations and vileness; showing himself more affected with his wrong, than with his loss; welcoming David home with a thankful neglect of himself, as not caring that Ziba had his substance, now that he had his king. David is satisfied, Mephibosheth restored to favour and lands: here are two kind hearts well met. David is full of satisfaction from Mephibosheth; Mephibosheth runs over with joy in David: David, like a gracious king, gives Mephibosheth, as before, Saul's lands to halves with Ziba; Mephibosheth, like a king, gives all to Ziba, for joy that God had given him David; all had been well, if Ziba had fared worse. Pardon me, O holy and glorious soul of a prophet, of a king, after God's own heart, I must needs blame thee for mercy; a fault that the best and most generous natures are most subject to: it is pity that so good a thing should do hurt; yet we find that the best, misused, is most dangerous. Who should be the pattern of kings, but the King of God? Mercy is the goodliest flower in his crown, much more in theirs, but with a difference: God's mercy is infinite, theirs limited; he says, "I will have mercy on whom I will:" they must say, I will have mercy on whom I should. And yet he, for all his infinite mercy, hath vessels of wrath, so must they; of whom his justice hath said, "Thine eye shall not spare them." A good man is pitiful to his beast; shall he therefore make much of toads and snakes? O that Ziba should go away with any possession, save of shame and sorrow; that he should be coupled with a Mephibosheth in a partnership of estates! O that David had changed the word a little!

A division was due here indeed: but of Ziba's ears from his head, or his head from his shoulders, for going about so maliciously to divide David from the son of Jonathan: an eye for an eye was God's rule. If that had been true, which Ziba suggested against Mephibosheth, he had been worthy to lose his head with his lands; being false, it had been but reason Ziba should have changed heads with Mephibosheth. Had not holy David himself been so stung with venomous tongues, that he cries out, in the bitterness of his soul, "What reward shall be given thee, O thou false tongue! even sharp arrows with hot burning coals." He that was so sensible of himself in Doeg's wrong, doth he feel so little of Mephibosheth in Ziba's? Are these the arrows of David's quiver? are these his hot burning coals? "Thou and Ziba divide." He that had said, Their tongue is a sharp sword; now that the sword of just revenge is in his hand, is this the blow he gives? "Divide the possession." I know not whether excess or want of mercy may prove most dangerous in the great; the one discourages good intentions with fear, the other may encourage wicked practices through presumption; those that are in eminent place must learn the mid-way betwixt both; so pardoning faults, that they may not provoke them; so punishing them, that they may not dishearten virtuous and well-meant actions: they must learn to sing that absolute ditty, whereof David had here forgotten one part, of mercy and judgment.

CONTEMPLATION III.—HANUN AND DAVID'S AMBASSADORS.

IT is not the meaning of religion to make men uncivil. If the king of Ammon were heathenish, yet his kindness may be acknowledged, may be returned by the king of Israel. I say not, but that perhaps David might maintain too strait a league with that forbidden nation. A little friendship is enough to an idolater; but even the savage cannibals may receive an answer of outward courtesy. If a very dog fawn upon us, we stroke him on the head, and clap him on the side; much less is the common band of humanity untied by grace. Disparity, in spiritual professions, is no warrant for ingratitude. He therefore, whose good nature proclaimed to show mercy to any branch of Saul's house for Jonathan's sake, will now also show kindness to Hanun, for the sake of Nahash his father

It was the same Nahash that offered the cruel condition to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, of thrusting out their right eyes for the admission into his covenant. He that was thus bloody in his designs against Israel, yet was kind to David; perhaps for no cause so much as Saul's opposition; and yet even this favour is held worthy both of memory and retribution. Where we have the acts of courtesy, it is not necessary we should enter into a strict examination of the grounds of it; while the benefit is ours, let the intention be their own. Whatever the hearts of men are, we must look at their hands, and repay, not what they meant, but what they did.

Nahash is dead, David sends ambassadors to condole his loss, and to comfort his son Hanun. No Ammonite but is sadly affected with the death of a father, though it gain him a kingdom. Even Esau could say, "The days of mourning for my father will come;" no earthly advantage can fill up the gap of nature. Those children are worse than Ammonites, that can think either gain or liberty worthy to countervail a parent's loss.

Carnal men are wont to measure another's foot by their own last; their own falsehood makes them unjustly suspicious of others. The princes of Ammon, because they are guilty to their own hollowness and doubleness of heart, are ready so to judge of David and his messengers; "Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? Hath not David rather sent his own servants to thee to search the city, and to spy it out, to overthrow it!" It is hard for a wicked heart to think well of any other; because it can think none better than itself, and knows itself evil. The freer a man is from vice himself, the more charitable he uses to be unto others.

Whatsoever David was, particularly in his own person, it was ground enough of prejudice that he was an Israelite. It was an hereditary and deep-settled hatred that the Ammonites had conceived against their brethren of Israel; neither can they forget that shameful and fearful foil which they received from the rescuers of Jabesh-Gilead: and now still do they stomach at the name of Israel. Malice once conceived in worldly hearts, is not easily extinguished, but, upon all occasions, is ready to break forth into a flame of revengeful actions.

Nothing can be more dangerous, than for young princes to meet with ill counsel in the entrance of their government: for both then are they most prone to take it, and most difficulty recovered from it; if we be set out of our way in the beginning of our journey, we wander all the day. How happy is that state, where both the counsellors are faithful to give only good advice, and the king wise to discern good advice from evil. The young king of Ammon is easily drawn to believe his peers, and to mistrust the messengers; and having now, in his conceit, turned them into spies, entertains them with a scornful disgrace; he shaves off one half off their beards, and cuts off one half of their garments, exposing them to the derision of all beholders. The Israelites were forbidden either a shaven beard or a short garment; in despite, perhaps, of their law, these ambassadors are sent away with both; certainly in a despite of their master, and a scorn of their persons.

King David is not a little sensible of the abuse of his messengers, and of himself in them: first, therefore, he desires to hide their shame, then to revenge it. Man hath but a double ornament of body, the one of nature, the other of art; the natural ornament is the hair, the artificial is apparel: David's messengers are deformed in both: the one is easily supplied by a new suit, the other can only be supplied out of the wardrobe of time: "Tarry at Jericho till your beards be grown." How easily had this deformity been removed, if, as Hanun had shaven one side of their faces, so they had shaven the other! What had this been but to resemble their younger age, or that other sex, in neither of which do we use to place any imagination of unbeseeming? Neither did there want some of their neighbour nations, whose faces age itself had not wont to cover with this shade of hair. But so respective is good David, and his wise senators, of their country forms, that they shall, by appointment, rather tarry abroad, till time have wrought their conformity, than vary from the received fashions of their own people. Alas! into what a licentious variety of strange disguises are we fallen! The glory of attire is sought in novelty, in misshapenness, in monstrousness: there is much latitude, much liberty in the use of these indifferent things; but, because we are free, we may not run wild, and never think we have scope enough unless we outrun modesty.

It is lawful for public persons to feel their own indignities, and to endeavour their revenge. Now David sends all the host of the mighty men to punish Ammon for so foul an abuse. Those that received the messengers of his love with scorn and insolency, shall now be severely saluted with the messengers of his wrath. It is just both with God and men, that they who know not how to take favours aright, should smart with judgments. Kindness repulsed, breaks forth into indignation; how much more, when it is repaid with an injurious affront?

David cannot but feel his own cheeks shaven, and his own coat cut in his ambassadors: they did but carry his person to Hanun; neither can he therefore but appropriate to himself the kindness or injury offered unto them. He that did so take to heart the cutting off but the lap of king Saul's garment, when it was laid aside from him, how must he needs be affected with this disdainful halving of his hair and robes in the person of his deputies! The name of ambassadors hath ever been sacred, and, by the universal law of nations, hath carried in it sufficient protection from all public wrongs: neither hath it been violated without a revenge. O God, what shall we say to these notorious contempts, which are daily cast upon thy spiritual messengers! Is it possible thou shouldst not feel them, thou shouldst not avenge them? We are made a gazing-stock to the world, to angels, and to men; we are despised and trodden down in the dust! "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

How obstinate are wicked men in their perverse resolutions! These foolish Ammonites had rather hire Syrians to maintain a war against Israel in so foul a quarrel, besides the hazard of their own lives, than confess the error of their jealous misconstruction.

It is one of the mad principles of wickedness, that it is a weakness to relent, and rather to die than yield. Even ill causes, once undertaken, must be upheld, although with blood; whereas the gracious heart, finding his own mistaking, doth not only remit of an ungrounded displeasure, but studies to be revenged of itself, and to give satisfaction to the offended.

The mercenary Syrians are drawn to venture their lives for a fee; twenty thousand of them are hired into the field against Israel. Fond pagans, that know not the value of a man! their blood cost them nothing, and they care not to sell it good-cheap. How can we think those men have souls, that esteem a little white earth above themselves? that never inquire into the justice of the quarrel, but the rate of the pay? that can rifle for drachms of silver in the bowels of their own flesh, and either kill or die for a day's wages?

Joab, the wise general of Israel, soon finds where the strength of the battle lay, and so marshals his troops, that the choice of his men shall encounter the van-guard of the Syrians. His brother Abishai leads the rest against the children of Ammon, with this covenant of mutual assistance, "If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me; but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then will I come and help thee." It is a happy thing, when the captains of God's people join together as brethren, and lend their hand to the aid of each other against the common adversary. Concord in defence, or assault, is the way to victory; as, contrarily, the division of the leaders is the overthrow of the army.

Set aside some particular actions, Joab was a worthy captain, both for wisdom and valour. Who could either exhort or resolve better than he? "Be of good courage, and let us play the men, for our people, and for the cities of our God; and the Lord do that which seemeth him good!" It is not either private glory or profit that whets his fortitude, but the respect to the cause of God and his people. That soldier can never answer it to God, that strikes not more as a justiciar, than as an enemy; neither doth he content himself with his own courage, but he animates others. The tongue of a commander fights more than his hand. It is enough for private men to exercise what life and limbs they have: a good leader must, out of his own abundance, put life and spirits into all others; if a lion lead sheep into the field, there is hope of victory. Lastly, when he hath done his best, he resolves to depend upon God for the issue, not trusting to his sword, or his bow, but to the providence of the Almighty, for success, as a man religiously awful, and awfully confident, while there should be no want in their own endeavours. He knew well that the race was not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, therefore he looks up above the hills, whence cometh his salvation. All valour is cowardice to that which is built upon religion.

I marvel not to see Joab victorious, while he is thus godly. The Syrians fly before him like flocks of sheep, the Ammonites follow them; the two sons of Zeruiah have nothing to do but to pursue and execute. The throats of the Ammonites are cut, for cutting the beards and coats of the Israelitish messengers: neither doth this revenge end in the field: Rabbah, the royal city of Ammon, is strongly beleaguered by Joab: the City of Waters (after well-near a year's siege) yieldeth, the rest can no longer hold out. Now Joab, as one that desireth more to approve himself a loyal and a careful subject, than a happy general, sends to his master David, that he should come personally, and encamp against the city, and take it; "Lest, (saith he) I take it, and it be called after my name." O noble and admirable fidelity of a dutiful servant, that prefers his lord to himself, and is so far from stealing honour from his master's deserts, that he willingly remits of his own to add unto his! The war was not his, he was only employed by his sovereign: the same person, that was wronged in the ambassadors, revengeth by his soldiers. The praise of the act shall, like fountain water, return to the sea, whence it originally came. To seek a man's own glory, is not glory. Alas! how many are there, who being sent to sue for God, woo for themselves! O God, it is a fearful thing to rob thee of that which is dearest to thee, glory, which, as thou wilt not give to any creature, so much less wilt thou endure that any creature should filch it from thee, and give it to himself! Have thou the honour of all our actions, who givest a being to our actions and us; and in both hast most justly regarded thine own praise.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—DAVID WITH BATHSHEBA AND URIAH.

WITH what unwillingness, with what fear, do I still look upon the miscarriage of the man after God's own heart! O holy prophet, who can promise himself always to stand, when he sees thee fallen and maimed with the fall? Who can assure himself of an immunity from the foulest sins, when he sees thee offending so heinously, so bloodily? Let profane eyes behold thee contentedly, as a pattern, as an excuse of sinning; I shall never look upon thee but through tears, as a woeful spectacle of human infirmity.

While Joab and all Israel were busy in the war against Ammon, in the siege of Rabbah, Satan finds time to lay siege to the secure heart of David. Who ever found David thus tempted, thus foiled in the days of his busy wars? Now only do I see the king of Israel rising from his bed in the evening; the time was, when he rose up in the morning to his early devotions, when he brake his nightly rest with public cares, with the business of the state; all that while he was innocent, he was holy;

but now that he wallows in the bed of idleness, he is fit to invite temptation. The industrious man hath no leisure to sin. The idle hath neither leisure nor power to avoid sin. Exercise is not more wholesome for the body than for the soul, the remission whereof breeds matter of disease in both. The water that hath been heated soonest freezeth. The most active spirit soonest tireth with slackening. The earth stands still, and is all dregs: the heavens ever move, and are pure. We have no reason to complain of the assiduity of the work; the toil of action is answered by the benefit; if we did less, we should suffer more. Satan, like an idle companion, if he finds us busy, flies back, and sees it no time to entertain vain purposes with us: we cannot please him better, than by casting away our work, to hold chat with him; we cannot yield so far and be guiltless.

Even David's eyes have no sooner the sleep rubbed out of them, than they rove to wanton prospects; he walks upon his roof, and sees Bathsheba washing herself; inquires after her, sends for her, solicits her to uncleanness. The same spirit, that shut up his eyes in an unseasonable sleep, opens them upon an enticing object; while sin hath such a solicitor, it cannot want either means or opportunity. I cannot think Bath sheba could be so immodest, as to wash herself openly, especially from her natural uncleanness. Lust is quick sighted. David hath espied her, where she could espy no beholder. His eyes recoil upon his heart, and have smitten him with sinful desire.

There can be no safety to that soul, where the senses are let loose He can never keep his covenant with God, that makes not a covenant with his eyes. It is an idle presumption to think the outward man may be free, while the inward is safe. He is more than a man whose heart is not led by his eyes; he is no regenerate man, whose eyes are not restrained by his heart.

O Bathsheba, how wert thou washed from thine uncleanness, when thou yieldedst to go into an adulterous bed! never wert thou so foul, as now when thou wert new washed. The worst of nature is cleanliness to the best of sin. Thou hadst been clean, if thou hadst not washed; yet for thee, I know how to plead infirmity of sex, and the importunity of a king. But what shall I say for thee, O thou royal prophet, and prophetical king of Israel? Where shall I find ought to extenuate that crime, for which God himself hath noted thee? Did not thine holy profession teach thee to abhor such a sin more than death? Was not thy justice wont to punish this sin with no less than death? Did not thy very calling call thee to a protection and preservation of justice, of chastity in thy subjects? Didst thou want store of wives of thine own? Wert thou restrained from taking more? Was there no beauty in Israel, but in a subject's marriage bed? Wert thou overcome by the vehement solicitations of an adultress? Wert thou not the tempter, the prosecutor of this uncleanness? I should accuse thee deeply, if thou hadst not accused thyself; nothing wanted to greaten thy sin, or our wonder and fear. O God, whither do we go, if thou stay us not? Who ever amongst the millions of thy servants could find himself furnished with stronger preservatives against sin? Against whom could such a sin find less pretence of prevailing? O keep thou us, that presumptuous sins prevail not over us; so only shall we be free from great offences.

The suits of kings are imperative: ambition did now prove a bawd to lust. Bathsheba yielded to offend God, to dishonour her husband, to clog and wound her own soul, to abuse her body. Dishonesty grows bold, when it is countenanced with greatness. Eminent persons had need be careful of their demands; they sin by authority, that are solicited by the mighty.

Had Bathsheba been mindful of her matrimonial fidelity, perhaps David had been soon checked in his inordinate desire; her facility furthers the sin. The first motioner of evil is most faulty; but as in quarrels, so in offences, the second blow (which is the consent) makes the fray. Good Joseph was moved to folly by his great and beautiful mistress; this fire fell upon wet tinder, and therefore soon went out.

Sin is not acted alone; if but one party be wise, both escape. It is no excuse to say, I was tempted, though by the great, though by the holy and learned: almost all sinners are misled by that transformed angel of light. The action is that we must regard, not the person. Let the mover be never so glorious, if he stir us to evil, he must be entertained with defiance.

The God, that knows now to raise good out of evil, blesses an adulterous copulation with that increase, which he denies to the chaste embracements of honest wedlock. Bathsheba hath conceived by David; and now at once conceives a sorrow and care how to smother the shame of her conception: he that did the fact, must hide it.

O David, where is thy repentance! where is thy tenderness and compunction of heart! where are those holy meditations, which had wont to take up thy soul! Alas, instead of clearing thy sin, thou labourest to cloak it, and spendest those thoughts in the concealing of thy wickedness, which thou shouldst rather have bestowed in preventing it. The best of God's children may not only be drenched in the waves of sin, but lie in them for the time, and perhaps sink twice to the bottom: what hypocrite could have done worse, than study how to cover the face of his sin from the eyes of men, while he regarded not the sting of sin in his soul?

As there are some acts wherein the hypocrite is a saint, so there are some wherein the greatest saint upon earth may be a hypocrite. Saul did thus go about to colour his sin, and is cursed. The vessels of mercy and wrath are not ever distinguishable by their actions: he makes the difference, that will have mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth.

It is rare and hard to commit a single sin. David hath abused the wife of Uriah, now he would abuse his person, in causing him to father a false seed. That worthy Hittite is sent for from the wars: and now, after some cunning and far-fetched questions, is dismissed to his house, not without a present of favour. David could not but imagine, that the beauty of his Bathsheba must needs be attractive enough to a husband, whom long absence in wars had withheld all that while from so pleasing a bed; neither could he think, that since that face and those breasts had power to allure himself to an unlawful lust, it could be possible, that

Uriah should not be invited by them to an allowed and warrantable fruition.

That David's heart might now the rather strike him, in comparing the chaste resolutions of his servant with his own light incontinence, good Uriah sleeps at the door of the king's palace, making choice of a stony pillow, under the canopy of heaven, rather than the delicate bed of her whom he thought as honest as he knew fair. "The ark, (saith he,) and Israel, and Judah, dwelt in tents, and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord abide in the open fields; shall I then go into my house to eat and drink, and lie with my wife? by thy life, and by the life of thy soul, I will not do this thing."

Who can but be astonished at this change, to see a soldier austere, and a prophet wanton! And how doth that soldier's austerity shame the prophet's wantonness! O zealous and mortified soul, worthy of a more faithful wife, of a more just master, how didst thou overlook all base sensuality, and hatedst to be happy alone! War and lust had wont to be reputed friends; thy breast is not more full of courage than chastity, and is so far from wandering after forbidden pleasures, that it refuseth lawful.

"There is a time to laugh, and a time to mourn; a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embracing." Even the best actions are not always seasonable, much less the indifferent. He, that ever takes liberty to do what he may, shall offend no less, than he that sometimes takes liberty to do what he may not.

If any thing, the ark of God is fittest to lead our tunes; accordingly as that is either distressed, or prospereth, should we frame our mirth or mourning. To dwell in ceiled houses, while the temple lies waste, is the ground of God's just quarrel.

"How shall we sing a song of the Lord in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; yea, if I prefer not Jerusalem to my chief joy."

As every man is a limb of the community, so must he be affected with the estate of the universal body, whether healthful or languishing; it did not more aggravate David's sin, that while the ark and Israel was in hazard and distress, he could find time to loose the reins to wanton desires and actions, than it magnifies the religious zeal of Uriah, that he abandons comfort, till he see the ark and Israel victorious.

Common dangers or calamities must (like the rapt motion) carry our hearts contrary to the ways of our private occasions. He, that cannot be moved with words, shall be tried with wine. Uriah had equally protested against feasting at home, and society with his wife; to the one, the authority of a king forceth him abroad, in hope that the excess thereof shall force him to the other. It is like, that holy captain intended only to yield so much obedience, as might consist with his course of austerity. But wine is a mocker; when it goes plausibly in, no man can imagine how it will rage and tyrannize: he, that receives that traitor within his gates, shall too late complain of surprisal. Like unto that ill spirit, it insinuates sweetly, but in the end it bites like a serpent, and hurts like a cockatrice Even good Uriah is made drunk; the holiest soul may be overtaken: it is hard gainsaying, where a king begins a health to a subject; where, O where will this wickedness end! David will now procure the sin of another to hide his own. Uriah's drunkenness is more David's offence than his. It is weakly yielded to of the one, which was wilfully intended of the other. The one was as the sinner, the other as the temper.

Had not David known that wine was an inducement to lust, he had spared those superfluous cups. Experience had taught him, that the eye, debauched with wine, will look upon strange women. The drunkard may be any thing save good. Yet in this the aim failed; grace is stronger than wine; while that withholds, in vain shall the fury of the grape attempt to carry Uriah to his own bed. Sober David is now worse than drunken Uriah. Had not the king of Israel been more intoxicate with sin, than Uriah with drink, he had not, in a sober intemperance, climbed up into that bed, which the drunken temperance of Uriah refused.

If David had been but himself, how had he loved, how had he honoured this honest and religious zeal, in his so faithful servant, whom now he cruelly seeks to reward with death! That fact, which wine cannot hide, the sword shall. Uriah shall bear his own mittimus unto Joab: "Put ye Uriah in the forefront of the strength of the battle, and retire back from him, that he may be smitten and die." What is become of thee, O thou good Spirit, that hadst wont to guide thy chosen servant in his former ways! Is not this the man, whom we lately saw so heart-smitten, for but cutting off the lap of the garment of a wicked master, that is now thus lavish of the blood of a gracious and well-deserving servant! Could it be likely, that so worthy a captain could fall alone? Could David have expiated this sin with his own blood, it had been but well spent; but to cover his sin with the innocent blood of others, was a crime above astonishment.

O the deep deceitfulness of sin! If the devil should have come to David, in the most lovely form of Bathsheba herself, and at the first should have directly, and in plain terms, solicited him to murder his best servant, I doubt not but he would have spit scorn in that face, on which he should otherways have doated; now, by many cunning windings, Satan rises up to that temptation, and prevails; that shall be done for a colour of guiltiness, whereof the soul would have hated to be immediately guilty: even those, that find a just horror, in leaping down from some high tower, yet may be persuaded to descend by stairs to the bottom. He knows not where he shall stay, that hath willingly slip into a known wickedness.

How many doth an eminent offender draw with him into evil? It could not be, but that divers of the attendants, both of David and Bathsheba, must be conscious to that adultery: great men's sins are seldom secret; and now Joab must be fetched in, as accessory to the murder. How must this example needs harden Joab against the conscience of Abner's blood! while he cannot but think, David cannot avenge that in me, which he acteth himself.

Honour is pretended to poor Uriah; death is meant. This man was one of the worthies of David; their courage sought glory in the difficult-est exploits. That reputation had never been purchased, without attempts of equal danger. Had not the leader and followers of Uriah been more treacherous than his enemies were strong, he had come off with victory. Now, he was not the first or last that perished by his friends. David hath forgotten, that himself was in like sort betrayed in his master's intention, upon the dowry of the Philistines' foreskins. I fear to ask, who ever noted so foul a plot in David's rejected predecessor? Uriah must be the messenger of his own death, Joab must be a traitor to his friend, the host of God must shamefully turn their backs upon the Ammonites, all that Israelitish blood must be shed, that murder must be seconded with dissimulation; and all this to hide one adultery. O God, thou hadst never suffered so dear a favourite of thine to fall so fearfully, if thou hadst not meant to make him an universal example to mankind, of not presuming, of not despairing. How can we presume of not sinning, or despair for sinning, when we find so great a saint thus fallen, thus risen!

CONTEMPLATION V.—NATHAN AND DAVID.

YET Bathsheba mourned for the death of that husband, whom she had been drawn to dishonour. How could she bestow tears enough upon that funeral, whereof her sin was the cause! If she had but a suspicion of the plot of his death, the fountains of her eyes could not yield water enough to wash off her husband's blood; her sin was more worthy of sorrow than her loss. If this grief had been right placed, the hope of hiding her shame, and the ambition to be a queen, had not so soon mitigated it; neither had she, upon any terms, been drawn into the bed of her husband's murderer. Every gleam of earthly comfort can dry up the tears of worldly sorrow. Bathsheba hath soon lost her grief at the court; the remembrance of a husband is buried in the jollity and state of a princess. David securely enjoys his ill-purchased love, and is content to exchange the conscience of his sin, for the sense of his pleasure. But the just and holy God will not put it up so; he that hates sin so much the more, as the offender is more dear to him, will let David feel the bruise of his fall. If God's best children have been sometimes suffered to sleep in a sin, at last he hath awakened them in a fright.

David was a prophet of God, yet he hath not only stept into these foul sins, but sojourns in them. If any profession or state of life could have privileged from sin, the angels had not sinned in heaven, nor man in paradise. Nathan the prophet is sent to the prophet David, for reproof, for conviction; had it been any other man's case, none could have been more quick-sighted than the princely prophet; in his own he is so blind, that God is fain to lend him others' eyes. Even the physician himself, when he is sick, sends for the counsel of those whom his health did mutually aid with advice. Let no man think himself too good to learn; teachers themselves may be taught that, in their own particular, which in a generality, they have often taught others: it is not only ignorance that is to be removed, but misaffection.

Who can prescribe a just period to the best man's repentance? About ten months are passed since David's sin; in all which time I find no news of any serious compunction; it could not be but some glances of remorse must needs have passed through his soul long ere this; but a due and solemn contrition was not heard of till Nathan's message, and, perhaps, had been further adjourned, if that monitor had been longer deferred. Alas! what long and dead sleeps may the holiest soul take in fearful sins! Were it not for thy mercy, O God, the best of us should end our spiritual lethargy in sleep of death.

It might have pleased God as easily to have sent Nathan to check David in his first purpose of sinning; so had his eyes been restrained, Bathsheba honest, Uriah alive with honour; now the wisdom of the Almighty knew how to win more glory by the permission of so foul an evil, than by the prevention, yea, he knew how, by the permission of one sin, to prevent millions. How many thousands had sinned, in a vain presumption on their own strength, if David had not thus offended! how many thousands had despaired, in the conscience of their own weaknesses, if these horrible sins had not received forgiveness! It is happy for all times, that we have so holy a sinner, so sinful a penitent: it matters not how bitter the pill is, but how well wrapped; so cunningly hath Nathan conveyed this dose, that it begins to work ere it be tasted. There is no one thing wherein is more use of wisdom, than the due contriving of a reprehension, which, in a discreet delivery, helps the disease; in an unwise, destroys nature.

Had not Nathan been used to the possession of David's ear, this complaint had been suspected. It well beseems a king to take information by a prophet. While wise Nathan was querulously discoursing of the cruel rich man, that had forcibly taken away the only lamb of his poor neighbour, how willingly doth David listen to the story, and how sharply, even above law, doth he censure the fact! "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." Full little did he think that he had pronounced sentence against himself; it had not been so heavy, if he had known on whom it should have-lighted. We have open ears and quick tongues to the vices of others; how severe justicers we can be to our very own crimes in others! how flattering parasites to another's crime in ourselves! The life of doctrine is in application. Nathan might have been long enough in his narration, in his invective, ere David would have been touched with his own guiltiness; but now, that the prophet brings the word home to his bosom, he cannot but be affected. We may take pleasure to hear men speak in the clouds, we never take profit till we find a propriety in the exhortation or reproof. There was not more cunning in the parable, than courage in the application; "Thou art the man." If David be a king, he may not look not to hear of his faults; God's messages may be no other than impartial. It is a treacherous flattery, in divine errands, to regard greatness. If prophets must be mannerly in the form, yet in the matter of reproof resolute: the words are not their own; they are but the heralds of the King of heaven, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel."

How thunder-stricken do we think David did now stand! how did the change of his colour bewray the confusion in his soul, while his conscience said the same within, which the prophet sounded in his ear! And now lest ought should be wanting to his humiliation, all God's former favours shall be laid before his eyes, by way of exprobation. He is worthy to be upbraided with mercies, that hath abused mercies unto wantonness. While we do well, God gives and says nothing; when we do ill, he lays his benefits in our dish, and casts them in our teeth, that our shame may be so much the more, by how much our obligations have been greater. The blessings of God, in our unworthy carriage, prove but the aggravations of sin and additions to judgment.

I see all God's children falling into sin, some of them lying in sin, none of them maintaining their sin: David cannot have the heart, or the face to stand out against the message of God; but now as a man confounded and condemned in himself, he cries out, in the bitterness of a wounded soul, "I have sinned against the Lord." It was but a short word, but passionate: and such as came from the bottom of a contrite heart. The greatest griefs are not most verbal. Saul confessed his sin more largely, less effectually. God cares not for phrases, but for affections. The first piece of our amends to God for sinning is the acknowledgment of sin; he can do little, that in a just offence cannot accuse himself. If we cannot be so good as we would, it is reason we should do God so much right, as to say how evil we are. And why was not this done sooner? It is strange to see how easily sin gets into the heart, how hardly it gets out of the mouth; is it, because sin, like unto Satan, where it hath got possession, is desirous to hold it, and knows that it is fully ejected by a free confession? or, because in a guiltiness of deformity, it hides itself in the breast where it is once entertained, and hates the light? or, because the tongue is so feed with self-love, that it is loath to be drawn unto any verdict against the heart or hands? or is it out of an idle misprision of shame, which while it should be placed in offending, is misplaced in disclosing of our offence?

However, sure I am, that God hath need even of racks to draw out confessions, and scarce in death itself are we wrought to a discovery of our errors.

There is no one thing wherein our folly shows itself more than in these hurtful concealments. Contrary to the proceedings of human justice, it is with God, "Confess and live;" no sooner can David say, "I have sinned," than Nathan infers, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." "He that hides his sins, shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy." Who would not accuse himself, to be acquitted of God? O God, who would not tell his wickedness to thee, that knowest it better than his own heart, that his heart may be eased of that wickedness, which being not told, killeth? Since we have sinned, why should we be niggardly of that action, wherein we may at once give glory to thee, and relief to our souls?

David had sworn, in a zeal of justice, that the rich oppressor, for but taking his poor neighbour's lamb, should die the death; God, by Nathan, is more favourable to David, than to take him at his word, "Thou shalt not die." O the marvellous power of repentance. Besides adultery, David had shed the blood of innocent Uriah. The strict law was, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth. He that smiteth with the sword, shall perish with the sword;" yet, as if a penitent confession had dispensed with the rigour of justice, now God says, "Thou shalt not die." David was the voice of the law, awarding death unto sin: Nathan was the voice of the gospel, awarding life unto the repentance for sin. Whatsoever the sore be, never any soul applied this remedy and died, never any soul escaped death that applied it not.

David himself shall not die for this fact; but his misbegotten child shall die for him. He that said, "The Lord hath put away thy sin," yet said also, "The sword shall not depart from thine house."

The same mouth, with one breath, pronounces the sentence both of absolution and death; absolution to the person, death to the issue. Pardon may well stand with temporal afflictions. Where God hath forgiven, though he doth not punish, yet he may chastise, and that unto blood; neither doth he always bear correction, where he remits revenge. So long as he smites us not as an angry judge, we may endure to smart from him as a loving father.

Yet even this rod did David deprecate with tears; how fain would he shake off so easy a load! The child is stricken; the father fasts, and prays, and weeps, and lies all night upon the earth, and abhors the noise of comfort; that child, which was the fruit and monument of his odious adultery, whom he could never have looked upon without recognition of his sin, in whose face he could but have still read the records of his own shame, is thus mourned for, thus sued for; it is easy to observe that good man over-passionately affected to his children. Who would not have thought, that David might have held himself well appaid, that his soul escaped an eternal death, his body a violent; though God should punish his sin in that child, in whom he sinned? yet even against this cross he bends his prayers, as if nothing had been forgiven him. There is no child that would be scourged, if he might escape for crying; no affliction is for the time other than grievous: neither is therefore yielded unto, without some kind of reluctation. Far yet was it from the heart of David to make any opposition to the will of God; he sued, he struggled not; there is no impatience in entreaties; he well knew that the threats of temporal evils ran commonly with a secret condition, and therefore might perhaps be avoided by humble importunity; if any means under heaven can avert judgments, it is our prayers.

God could not choose but like well the boldness of David's faith, who, after the apprehension of so heavy a displeasure, is so far from doubting of the forgivenness of his sin, that he dares become a suitor unto God for his sick child. Sin doth not make us more strange than faith confident.

But it is not in the power of the strongest faith to preserve us from all afflictions; after all David's prayers and tears, the child must die. The careful servants dare not whisper this sad news: they who had found their master so averse from the motion of comfort in the sickness of the child, feared him incapable of comfort in his death.

Suspicion is quick-witted. Every occasion makes us misdoubt that event which we fear. This secrecy proclaims that which they were so loath to utter. David perceives his child dead, and now he rises up from the earth whereon he lay, and washes himself, and changeth his apparel, and goes first into God's house to worship, and into his own to eat; now he refuses no comfort, who before would take none. The issue of things doth more fully show the will of God than the prediction; God never did any thing but what he would; he hath sometimes foretold that for trial, which his secret will intended not; he would foretell it, he would not effect it: because he would therefore foretell it, that he might not effect it. His predictions of outward evils are not always absolute, his actions are. David well sees, by the event, what the decree of God was concerning his child, which now he could not strive against without a vain impatience. Till we know the determination of the Almighty, it is free for us to strive in our prayers, to strive with him, not against him; when once we know them, it is our duty to sit down in a silent contentation.

"While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live; but now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again?"

The grief, that goes before an evil for remedy, can hardly be too much, but that which follows an evil past remedy, cannot be too little. Even in the saddest accident, death, we may yield something to nature, nothing to impatience; immoderation of sorrow, for losses past hope of recovery, is more sullen than useful; our stomach may be bewrayed by it, not our wisdom.

CONTEMPLATION VI.—AMNON AND TAMAR.

It is not possible that any word of God should fall to the ground. David is not more sure of forgiveness than smart. Three main sins passed him in this business of Uriah; adultery, murder, dissimulation: for all which he receives present payment; for adultery, in the deflowering of his daughter Tamar; for murder, in the killing of his son Amnon: for dissimulation in the contriving of both; yet all this was but the beginning of evils. Where the father of the family brings sin home to the house, it is not easily swept out. Unlawful lust propagates itself by example. How justly is David scourged by the sin of his sons, whom his act taught to offend?

Maacha was the daughter of a heathenish king: by her had David that beautiful, but unhappy issue, Absalom, and his no less fair sister Tamar. Perhaps thus late doth David feel the punishment of that unfit choice. I should have marvelled, if so holy a man had not found crosses in so unequal a match, either in his person, or at least in his seed.

Beauty, if it be not well disciplined, proves not a friend, but a traitor; three of David's children are undone by it at once. What else was guilty of Amnon's incestuous love, Tamar's ravishment, Absalom's pride? It is a blessing to be fair, yet such a blessing, as, if the soul answer not to the face, may lead to a curse. How commonly have we seen the foulest soul dwell fairest. It was no fault of Tamar's that she was beautiful; the candle offends not in burning, the foolish fly offends in scorching itself in the flame; yet it is no small misery to become a temptation unto another; and to be made but the occasion of other's ruin. Amnon is love-sick of his sister Tamar, and languishes of that unnatural heat. Whither will not wanton lust carry the inordinate minds of pampered and ungoverned youths? None but this half-sister will please the eyes of the young prince of Israel. Ordinary pleasures will not content those whom the conceit of greatness, youth, and ease, have let loose to their appetite.

Perhaps yet this unkindly flame might in time have gone out alone, had not there been a Jonadab to blow these coals with ill counsel. It were strange, if great princes should want some parasitical followers, that are ready to feed their ill humours. "Why art thou, the king's son, so lean from day to day?" As if it were unworthy the heir of a king to suffer either law or conscience to stand in the way of his desires: whereas wise princes know well, that their places give them no privilege of sinning, but call them in rather to so much more strictness, as their example may be more prejudicial.

Jonadab was the cousin-german of Amnon. Ill advice is so much more dangerous, as the interest of the giver is more. Had he been a true friend, he had bent all the forces of his dissuasion against the wicked motions of that sinful lust; and had showed the prince of Israel how much those lewd desires provoked God, and blemished himself, and had lent his hand to strangle them in their first conception. There cannot be a more worthy improvement of friendship, than in a fervent opposition to the sins of them whom we profess to love. No enemy can be so mortal to great princes, as those officious clients, whose flattery soothes them up in wickedness: these are traitors to the soul, and by a pleasing violence, kill the best part eternally.

How ready at hand is an evil suggestion! Good counsel is like unto well-water, that must be drawn up with a pump or bucket. Ill counsel is like to conduit-water, which, if the cock be but turned, runs out alone. Jonadab hath soon projected how Amnon shall accomplish his lawless purpose. The way must be to feign himself sick in body, whose mind was sick of lust; and, under this pretence, to procure the presence of her who had wounded, and only might cure him.

The daily increasing languor and leanness and paleness of love sick Amnon, might well give colour to a kerchief and a pallet. Now is it soon told David that his eldest son is cast upon his sick-bed: there needs no suit for his visitation. The careful father hastens to his bed-side, not without doubts and fears. He that was lately so afflicted with the sickness of a child that scarce lived to see the light, how sensible must we needs think he would be of the indisposition of his first-born son, in the prime of his age and hopes! It is not given to any prophet to foresee all things. Happy had it been for David, if Amnon had been truly sick, and sick unto death; yet who could have persuaded this passionate father to have been content with this succession of losses, this early loss of his successor! How glad is he to hear, that his daughter Tamar's skill might be likely to fit the diet of so dear a patient! Conceit is wont to rule much, both in sickness and in the cure. Tamar is sent by her father to the house of Amnon; her hand only must dress that dish which may please the nice palate of her sick brother. Even the children of kings, in those homelier times, did not scorn to put their fingers to some works of housewifery. "She took flour and did knead it, and did make cakes in his sight, and did bake the cakes, and took a pan, and poured them out before him." Had she not been sometimes used to such domestic employments, she had been now to seek; neither had this been required of her, but upon the knowledge of her skill. She doth not plead the impairing of her beauty by the scorching of the fire, nor thinks her hand too dainty for such mean services, but settles to the work, as one that had rather regard the necessities of her brother, than her own state. Only pride and idleness have banished honest and thrifty diligence out of the houses of the great.

This was not yet the dish that Amnon longed for. It was the cook, and not the cakes, which that wanton eye affected. Unlawful acts seek for secrecy; the company is dismissed, Tamar only stays. Good meaning suspects nothing; while she presents the meat she had prepared to her sick brother, herself is made a prey to his outrageous lust. The modest virgin entreats and persuades in vain: she lays before him the sin, the shame, the danger of the fact; and, since none of these can prevail, fain would win time by the suggestion of impossible hopes. Nothing but violence can stay a resolved sinner; what he cannot by entreaty, he will have by force. If the devil were not more strong in men than nature, they would never seek pleasure in violence. Amnon hath no sooner fulfilled his beastly desires, than he hates Tamar more than he loved her. Inordinate lust never ends but in discontentment; loss of spirits, and the remorse of soul, make the remembrance of that act tedious, whose expectation promised delight. If we could see the back of sinful pleasures, ere we behold their face, our hearts could not but be forestalled with a just detestation. Brutish Amnon, it was thyself whom thou shouldst have hated for this villany, not thine innocent sister! Both of you lay together, only one committed incest. What was she but a patient in that impotent fury of lust? How unjustly do carnal men misplace their affections! No man can say, whether that love or this hatred were more unreasonable. Fraud drew Tamar into the house of Amnon, force entertained her within, and drove her out. Fain would she have hid her shame where it was wrought, and may not be allowed it. That roof, under which she came with honour, and in obedience and love, may not be lent her, for the time, as a shelter of her ignominy. Never any savage could be more barbarous. Shechem had ravished Dinah; his offence did not make her odious; his affection so continued, that he is willing rather to draw blood of himself and his people, than forego her whom he had abused; Amnon, in one hour, is in the excess of love and hate, and is sick of her for whom he was sick. She that lately kept the keys of his heart, is now locked out of his doors. Unruly passions run ever into extremities, and are then best appaid, when they are furthest off from reason and moderation.

What could Amnon think would be the event of so foul a fact, which, as he had not the grace to prevent, so he hath not the care to conceal? If he looked not so high as heaven, what could he imagine would follow hereupon, but the displeasure of a father, the danger of law, the indignation of a brother, the shame and outcries of the world; all which he might have hoped to avoid by secrecy and plausible courses of satisfaction. It is the just judgment of God upon presumptuous offenders, that they lose their wit, together with their honesty; and are either so blinded, that they cannot foresee the issue of their actions, or so besotted, that they do not regard it.

Poor Tamar can but bewail that which she could not keep, her virginity, not lost, but torn from her, by a cruel violence. She rends her princely robe, and lays ashes on her head, and laments the shame of another's sin, and lives more desolate than a widow, in the house of her brother Absalom.

In the meantime, what a corrosive must this news needs be to the heart of good David, whose fatherly command had, out of love, cast his daughter into the jaws of this lion! What an insolent affront must he needs construe this to be offered by a son to a father, that the father should be made the pander of his own daughter to his son! He that lay upon the ground weeping for but the sickness of an infant, how vexed do we think he was with the villany of his heir, with the ravishment of his daughter, both of them worse than many deaths: what revenge can he think of for so heinous a crime less than death; and what less than death is it to him, to think of a revenge? Rape was, by the law of God, capital; how much more when it is seconded with incest? Anger was not punishment enough for so high an offence; yet this is all that I hear of from so indulgent a father, saving that he makes up the rest with sorrow, punishing his son's outrage in himself. The better natured and more gracious a man is, the more subject he is to the danger of an over-remissness, and the excess of favour and mercy. The mild injustice is no less perilous to the commonwealth, than the cruel.

If David, perhaps out of the conscience of his own late offence, will not punish this fact, his son Absalom shall; not out of any care of justice, but in a desire of revenge. Two whole years hath this sly courtier smothered in indignation, and feigned kindness, else his invitation of Amnon, in special, had been suspected. Even gallant Absalom was a great sheep-master. The bravery and magnificence of a courtier must be built upon the grounds of frugality. David himself is bidden to this bloody sheep-shearing: it was no otherwise meant, but that the father's eyes should be the witnesses of the tragical execution of one son by another; only David's love kept him from that horrible spectacle. He is careful not to be chargeable to that son who cares not to overcharge his father's stomach with a feast of blood.

Amnon hath so quite forgot his sin, that he dares go to feast in that house where Tamar was mourning, and suspects not the kindness of him, whom he had deserved, of a brother, to make an enemy. Nothing is more unsafe to be trusted, than the fair looks of a festered heart. Where true charity or just satisfaction have not wrought a sound reconciliation, malice doth but lurk for the opportunity of an advantage.

It was not for nothing that Absalom deferred his revenge, which is now so much more exquisite, as it is longer protracted. What could be more fearful than, when Amnon's heart was merry with wine, to be suddenly stricken with death? as if this execution had been no less intended to the soul than to the body. How wickedly soever this was done by Absalom, yet how just was it with God, that he, who in two years' impunity would find no leisure of repentance, should now receive a punishment without possibility of repentance!

O God, thou art righteous to reckon for those sins which human partiality or negligence hath omitted; and, while thou punishest sin with sin, to punish sin with death. If either David had called Amnon to account for this villany, or Amnon had called himself, the revenge had not been so desperate. Happy is the man, that by an unfeigned repentance, acquits his soul from his known evils, and improves the days of his peace to the prevention of future vengeance, which, if it be not done, the hand of God shall as surely overtake us in judgment, as the hand of Satan hath overtaken us in miscarriage unto sin.

CONTEMPLATION VII.—ABSALOM'S RETURN AND CONSPIRACY.

One act of injustice draws on another: the injustice of David, in not punishing the rape of Amnon, procures the injustice of Absalom, in punishing Amnon with murder. That which the father should have justly revenged, and did not, the son revenges unjustly. The rape of a sister was no less worthy of death, than the murder of a brother; yea, this latter sin was therefore the less, because that brother was worthy of death, though by another hand; whereas that sister was guilty of nothing but modest beauty; yet he that knew this rape passed over a whole two years with impunity, dares not trust the mercy of a father in the pardon of his murder; but for three years hides his head in the court of his grandfather, the king of Geshur. Doubtless that heathenish prince gave him a kind welcome, for so meritorious a revenge of the dishonour done to his own loins.

No man can tell, how Absalom should have sped from the hands of his otherwise over-indulgent father, if he had been apprehended in the heat of the fact. Even the largest love may be over-strained, and may give a fall in the breaking: these fearful effects of lenity might perhaps have whetted the severity of David, to shut up these outrages in blood. Now this displeasure was weakened with age. Time and thoughts have digested this hard morsel. David's heart told him, that his hands had a share in this offence; that Absalom did but give that stroke which himself had wrongfully forborne; that the unrecoverable loss of one son would be but woefully relieved with the loss of another; he therefore, that in the news of the deceased infant could change his clothes, and wash himself, and cheer up his spirits, with the resolution of, "I shall go to him, he shall not return to me," comforts himself concerning Amnon: and begins to long for Absalom.

Those three years' banishment seemed not so much a punishment to the son, as to the father. Now David begins to forgive himself: yet, out of his wisdom, so inclines to favour, that he conceals it; and yet so conceals it, that it may be descried by a cunning eye. If he had cast out no glances of affection, there had been no hopes for his Absalom; if he had made profession of love after so foul an act, there had been no safety for others; now, he lets fall so much secret grace as may both hold up Absalom in the life of his hopes, and not hearten the presumption of others.

Good eyes see light through the smallest chink. The wit of Joab hath soon discerned David's reserved affection, and knows how to serve him in that which he would, and would not accomplish; and now devises how to bring into the light that birth of desire, whereof he knew David was both big, and ashamed. A woman of Tekoah (that sex hath been ever held more apt for wiles) is suborned to personate a mourner, and to say that, by way of parable, which, in plain terms, would have sounded too harshly; and now, while she lamentably lays forth the loss and danger of her son, she shows David his own; and, while she moves compassion to her pretended issue, she wins David to a pity of himself, and a favourable sentence for Absalom. We love ourselves better than others, but we see others better than ourselves: whoso would perfectly know his own case, let him view it in another's person.

Parables sped well with David: one drew him to repent of his own sin, another to remit Absalom's punishment: and now, as glad to hear this plea, and willing to be persuaded unto that, which, if he durst, he would have sought for, he gratifies Joab with the grant of that suit, which Joab more gratified him in suing for; "Go, bring again the young man Absalom."

How glad is Joab, that he hath light upon one act, for which the sun, both setting and rising, should shine upon him! and now he speeds to Geshur, to fetch back Absalom to Jerusalem: he may bring the long-banished prince to the city; but to the court he may not bring him. "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face."

The good king hath so smarted with mercy, that now he is resolved upon austerity, and will relent but by degrees; it is enough for Absalom that he lives, and may now breathe in his native air; David's face is no object for the eyes of murderers. What a darling this son was to his father, appears in that after an unnatural and barbarous rebellion, passionate David wishes to have changed lives with him; yet now, while his bowels yearned, his brow frowned: the face may not be seen where the heart is set.

The best of God's saints may be blinded with affection: but when they shall once see their errors, they are careful to correct them. Wherefore serves the power of grace, but to subdue the insolencies of nature? It is the wisdom of parents, as to hide their hearts from their best children, so to hide their countenances from the ungracious: fleshly respects may not abate their rigour to the ill-deserving. For the child to see all his father's love, it is enough to make him wanton, and of wanton wicked. For a wicked child to see any of his father's love, it emboldens him in evil, and draws on others.

Absalom's house is made his prison; justly is he confined to the place which he had stained with blood. Two years doth he live in Jerusalem, without the happiness of his father's sight; it was enough for David and him to see the smoke of each other's chimneys. In the meantime, how impatient is Absalom of this absence! He sends for Joab, the solicitor of his return; so hard a hand doth wise and holy

David carry over his reduced son, that his friendly intercessor Joab dares not visit him.

He, that afterwards kindled that seditious fire over all Israel, sets fire now on the field of Joab; whom love cannot draw to him, fear and anger shall. Continued displeasure hath made Absalom desperate; five years are passed since he saw the face of his father, and now he is no less weary of his life than of this delay. "Wherefore am I come down from Geshur? It had been better for me to have been there still. Now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me." Either banishment, or death, seemed as tolerable to him, as the debarring of his father's sight.

What a torment shall it be to the wicked, to be shut out for ever from the presence of a God, without all possible hopes of recovery! This was but a father of the flesh, by whom if Absalom lived at first, yet in him he lived not, yea, not without him only, but against him that son found he could live. God is the Father of spirits, in whom we *so live*, that without him can be no life, no being; to be ever excluded from him, in whom we live and are, what can it be, but an eternal dying, an eternal perishing? If in thy presence, O God, be the fulness of joy, in thine absence must needs be the fulness of horror and torment. "Hide not thy face from us, O Lord, but show us the light of thy countenance, that we may live and praise thee."

Even the fire of Joab's field warmed the heart of David, while it gave him proof of the heat of Absalom's filial affection. As a man therefore inwardly weary of so long displeasure, at last he receives Absalom to his sight, to his favour, and seals his pardon with a kiss. Natural parents know not how to retain an everlasting anger towards the fruit of their loins; how much less shall the God of mercies be unreconcilably displeased with his own, and suffer his wrath to burn like fire that cannot be quenched! "He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever; his wrath endureth but a moment; in his favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Absalom is now as great as fair; beauty and greatness make him proud; pride works his ruin: great spirits will not rest content with a moderate prosperity. Ere two years be run out, Absalom runs out into a desperate plot of rebellion; none but his own father was above him in Israel; none was so likely, in human expectation, to succeed his father. If his ambition could but have contained itself for a few years, as David was now near his period, dutiful carriage might have procured that by succession, which now he sought by force. An aspiring mind is ever impatient, and holds time itself an enemy, if it thrust itself importunately betwixt the hopes and fruition. Ambition is never but in travail, and can find no intermission of painful throes, till she have brought forth her abortive desires. How happy were we, if our affection could be so eager of spiritual and heavenly promotions! O that my soul could find itself so restless till it feel the weight of that crown of glory!

Outward pomp, and unwonted shows of magnificence, are wont much to affect the light minds of the vulgar. Absalom therefore, to the incomparable comeliness of his person, adds the unusual state of a more than princely equipage. His chariots rattle, and his horses trample proudly in the streets; fifty footmen run before their glittering master; Jerusalem rings of their glorious prince, and is ready to adore these continual triumphs of peace. Excess and novelty of expensive bravery and ostentation in public persons, gives just cause to suspect either vanity, or a plot. True-hearted David can misdoubt nothing in him, to whom he had both given life, and forgiven this. Love construed all this as meant to the honour of a father's court, to the expression of joy and thankfulness for his reconcilement. The eyes and tongues of men are thus taken up; now hath Absalom laid snares for their hearts also; "He rises early and stands beside the way of the gate." Ambition is no niggard of her pains; seldom ever is good meaning so industrious. The more he shined in beauty and royal attendance, so much more glory it was to neglect himself, and to prefer the care of justice to his own case. Neither is Absalom more painful than plausible; his ear is open to all plaintiffs, all petitioners: there is no cause which he flatters not, "See thy matters are good and right;" his hand flatters every comer with a salutation, his lips with a kiss. All men, all matters are soothed, saving the state and government; the censure of that is no less deep, than the applause of all others, "There is none deputed of the king to hear thee." What insinuations could be more powerful? No music can be so sweet to the ears of the unstable multitude, as to hear well of themselves, ill of their governors. Absalom needs not to wish himself upon the bench; every man says, O what a courteous prince is Absalom! what a just and careful ruler would Absalom be! how happy were we, if we might be judged by Absalom! those qualities, which are wont single to grace others, have conspired to meet in Absalom; goodliness of person, magnificence of state, gracious affability, unwearied diligence, humility in greatness, feeling pity, love of justice, care of the commonwealth! The world hath not so complete a prince as Absalom! Thus the hearts of the people are not won, but stolen, by a close traitor, from their lawfully anointed sovereign. Over-fair shows are a just argument of unsoundness; no natural face hath so clear a white and red as the painted. Nothing wants now but a cloak of religion, to perfect the treachery of that ungracious son, who carried peace in his name, war in his heart: and how easily is that put on! Absalom hath a holy vow to be paid in Hebron: the devout man had made it long since, while he was exiled in Syria, and now he hastes to perform it: "If the Lord shall bring me back again to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord." Wicked hypocrites care not to play with God, that they may mock men.' The more deformed any act is, the fairer vizard it still seeketh.

How glad is the good old king, that he is blessed with so godly a son, whom he dismisseth laden with his causeless blessings! What trust is there in flesh and blood, when David is not safe from his own loins? The conspiracy is now fully formed; there lacked nothing but his guilt of piety to win favour and value in all eyes; and now it is a wonder, that but two hundred honest citizens go up with Absalom from Jerusalem; the true-hearted lie most open to credulity. How easy is it to beguile harmless intentions! The name of David's son carries them against the father of Absalom; and now these simple Israelites are unwittingly made loyal rebels. Their hearts are free from a plot, and they mean nothing but fidelity in the attendance of a traitor. How many thousands are thus ignorantly misled into the train of error! their simplicity is as worthy of pity, as their misguidance of indignation. Those that will suffer themselves to be carried with semblances of truth and faithfulness must needs be as far from safety as innocence.

BOOK XVI.

CONTEMPLATION I.—SHIMEI CURSING.

With a heavy heart, and a covered head, and a weeping eye, and bare feet, is David gone away from Jerusalem; never did he with more joy come up to this city, than now he left it with sorrow; how could he do otherwise, whom the insurrection of his own son drove out from his house, from his throne, from the ark of God? And now when the depth of this grief deserved nothing but compassion, the foul mouth of Shimei entertains David with curses! There is no small cruelty in the picking out of a time for mischief; that word would scarce gall at one season, which at another killeth. The same shaft flying with the wind pierces deep, which against it can hardly find strength to stick upright. The valour and justice of children condemns it, for injuriously cowardly, to strike their adversary when he is once down. It is the murder of the tongue to insult upon those whom God hath humbled, and to draw blood of that back which is yet blue from the hand of the Almighty. If Shimei had not presumed upon David's dejection, he durst not have been thus bold; now he, that perhaps durst not have looked at one of these worthies single, defies them all at once, and doth both cast and speak stones against David and all his army. The malice of base spirits sometimes carries them further than the courage of the valiant.

In all the time of David's prosperity, we heard no news of Shimei; his silence and colourable obedience made him pass for a good subject; yet all that while was his heart unsound and traitorous. Peace and good success hides many a false heart, like as the snow-drift covers a heap of dung, which once melting away, descries the rottenness that lay within. Honour and welfare are but flattering glasses of men's affections. Adversity will not deceive us, but will make a true report, as of our own powers, so of the disposition of others.

He that smiled on David in his throne, cursed him in his flight. If there be any quarrels, any exceptions to be taken against a man, let him look to have them laid in his dish when he fares the hardest. This practice have wicked men learned of their master, to take the utmost advantages of our afflictions. He that suffers had need to be double armed, both against pain and censure.

Every word of Shimei was a slander. He that took Saul's spear from his head, and repented to have but cut the lap of his garment, is reproached as a man of blood. The man after God's own heart is branded for a man of Belial. He, that was sent for out of the fields to be anointed, is taxed for an usurper: if David's hands were stained with blood, yet not of Saul's house; it was his servant not his master that bled by him; yet is the blood of the Lord's anointed cast in David's teeth, by the spite of a false tongue. Did we not see David, after all the proofs of his humble loyalty, shedding the blood of that Amalekite, who did but say he shed Saul's? Did we not hear him lament passionately for the death of so ill a master, chiding the mountains of Gilboa on which he fell; and angrily wishing, that no dew might fall where that blood was poured out; and charging the daughters of Israel to weep over Saul, who had clothed them in scarlet? Did we not hear and see him inquiring for any remainder of the house of Saul, that he might show him the kindness of God? Did we not see him honouring lame Mephibosheth with a princely seat at his own table! Did we not see him revenging the blood of his rival Ishbosheth, upon the heads of Rechab and Baanah? What could any living man have done more to wipe off these bloody aspersions? Yet is not a Shimei ashamed to charge innocent David with all the blood of the house of Saul.

How is it likely this clamorous wretch had secretly traduced the name of David, all the time of his government, that dares thus accuse him to his face, before all the mighty men of Israel, who were witnesses of the contrary? The greater the person is, the more open do his actions lie to misinterpretation and censure. Every tongue speaks partially, according to the interest he hath in the cause, or the patient. It is not possible that eminent persons should be free from imputations: innocence can no more protect them than power.

If the patience of David can digest this indignity, his train cannot; their fingers could not but itch to return iron for stones. If Shimei rail on David, Abishai rails on Shimei; Shimei is of Saul's family, Abishai of David's: each speaks for his own. Abishai most justly bends his tongue against Shimei, as Shimei against David most unjustly. Had Shimei been any other than a dog, he had never so rudely barked at a harmless passenger; neither could he deserve less than the loss of that head which had uttered such blasphemies against God's anointed. The zeal of Abishai doth but plead for justice and is checked: "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?" David said not so much to his reviler, as to his abettor: he well saw that a revenge was just, but not seasonable; he found the present a fit time to suffer wrongs, not to right them: he therefore gives way rather meekly to his own humiliation, than to the punishment of another. There are seasons wherein lawful motions are not fit to be cherished; anger doth not become a mourner; one passion at once is enough for the soul. Unadvised zeal may be more prejudicial than a cold remissness.

What if the Lord, for the correction of his servant, had said unto Shimei, Curse David; yet is Shimei's curse no less worthy of Abishai's sword: the sin of Shimei's curse was his own, the smart of the curse was God's. God wills that, as David's chastisement, which he hates as Shimei's wickedness: that lewd tongue moved from God, it moved lewdly from Satan. Wicked men are never the freer from guilt or punishment, for that hand which the holy God hath in their offensive actions; yet David can say, "Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him;" as meaning to give a reason of his own patience, rather than Shimei's impunity. The issue showed, how well David could distinguish betwixt the act of God and of a traitor; how he could both kiss the rod and burn it. There can be none so strong motive of our meek submission to evils, as the acknowledgment of their original. He, that can see the hand of God striking him by the hand or tongue of an enemy, shall more awe the first mover of his harm, than malign the instrument. Even while David laments the rebellion of his son, he gains by it, and makes that the argument of his patience, which was the exercise of it. "Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more now may this Benjamite do it?" The wickedness of an Absalom may rob his father of comfort, but shall help to add to his father's goodness. It is the advantage of great crosses, that they swallow up the less. One man's sin cannot be excused by another's, the lesser by the greater. If Absalom be a traitor, Shimei may not curse and rebel: but the passion conceived from the indignity of a stranger, may be abated by the harder measure of our own; if we can therefore suffer, because we have suffered, we have profited by our affliction. A weak heart faints with every addition of succeeding trouble; the strong recollects itself, and is grown so skilful, that it bears off one mischief with another.

It is not either the unnatural insurrection of Absalom, nor the unjust curses of Shimei, that can put David quite out of heart: "It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and will requite good for his cursing, this day." So well was David acquainted with the proceedings of God, that he knew cherishing was ever wont to follow stripes; after vehement evacuation, cordials; after a dark night, the clear light of the morning. Hope therefore doth not only uphold, but cheer up his heart, in the midst of his sorrow. If we can look beyond the cloud of our affliction, and see the sunshine of comfort on the other side of it, we cannot be so discouraged with the presence of evil, as heartened with the issue: as, on the contrary, let a man be never so merry within, and see pain and misery waiting for him at the door, his expectation of evil shall easily daunt all the sense of his pleasure. The retributions of temporal favours go but by peradventures,—"It may be the Lord will look on mine affliction;"—of eternal, are certain and infallible; if we suffer, we shall reign; why should not the assurance of reigning make us triumph in suffering?

David's patience draws on the insolence of Shimei. Evil natures grow presumptuous upon forbearance. In good dispositions, injury unanswered grows weary of itself, and dies in a voluntary remorse; but in those dogged stomachs, which are only capable of the restraints of fear, the silent digestion of a former wrong provokes a second. Mercy had need to be guided with wisdom, lest it prove cruel to itself.

O the base minds of inconstant time-servers! Stay but a while, till the wheel be a little turned, you shall see humble Shimei fall down on his face before David, in his return over Jordan: now his submission shall equal his former rudeness; his prayers shall requite his curses, his tears makes amends for his stones: "Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me: neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely, the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart; for thy servant doth know that I have sinned." False-hearted Shimei! had Absalom prospered, thou hadst not sinned, thou hadst not repented; then hadst thou bragged of thine insultation over his miseries, whose pardon thou now beggest with tears. The changes of worldly minds are thankless, since they are neither wrought out of conscience nor love, but only by slavish fear of just punishment.

David could say no more to testify his sorrow, for his heinous sins against God, to Nathan, than Shimei says of himself to David, whereto may be added the advantage of a voluntary confession in this offender, which in David was extorted by the reproof of a prophet; yet is David's confession seriously penitent, Shimei's craftily hypocritical. Those alterations are justly suspected, which are shaped according to the times and outward occasions. The true penitent looks only at God and his sin, and is changed when all other things are themselves.

Great offences had need of answerable satisfaction. As Shimei was the only man, of the house of Benjamin, that came forth and cursed David in his flight, so is he the first man (even before those of the house of Joseph, though nearer in situation) that comes to meet David in his return with prayers and gratulations. Notorious offenders may not think to sit down with the task of ordinary services: the retributions of their obedience must be proportionable to their crimes.

CONTEMPLATION II.—ACHITOPHEL.

So soon as David heard of Achitophel's hand in that conspiracy, he falls to his prayers: "O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Achitophel into foolishnes." The known wisdom of his revolted counsellor made him a dangerous and dreadful adversary. Great parts misemployed cannot but prove most mischievous. When wickedness is armed with wit and power, none but a God can defeat it; when we are matched with a strong and subtle enemy, it is high time, if ever, to be devout. If the bounty of God have thought good to furnish his creatures with powers to war against himself, his wisdom knows how to turn the abuse of *those* powers to the shame of the owners, and glory of the giver.

O the policy of this Machiavel of Israel, no less deep than hell itself! "Go into thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and when all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father, the hands of all that are with thee shall be strong." The first care must be to secure the faction. There can be no safety in siding with a doubtful rebel. If Absalom be a traitor, yet he is a son. Nature may return to itself, Absalom may relent, David may remit; Where then are we that have helped to promote the conspiracy? the danger is ours, while this breach may be pieced. There is no way but to engage Absalom in some further act, uncapable of forgiveness: besides the throne, let him violate the bed of his father; unto his treason let him add an incest no less unnatural; now shall the world see that Absalom neither hopes nor cares for the reconciliation of a father. Our quarrel can never have any safe end but victory, the hope whereof depends upon the resolution of our followers; they cannot be resolute, but upon the unpardonable wickedness of their leader: neither can this villany be shameful enough, if it be secret. The closeness of evil argues fear, or modesty; neither of which can beseem him that would be a successful traitor. Set up a tent on the top of the house, and let all Israel be witnesses of thy sin, and thy father's shame. Ordinary crimes are for vulgar offenders. Let Absalom sin eminently, and do that which may make the world at once to blush and wonder.

Who would ever have thought that Achitophel had lived at court, at the council-table of a David? Who would think that mouth had ever spoken well? Yet had he been no other than as the oracle of God to the religious court of Israel, even while he was not wise enough to be good. Policy and grace are not always lodged under one roof. This man, while he was one of David's deep counsellors, was one of David's fools, that said in their hearts, "There is no God;" else he could not have hoped to make good an evil with worse, to build the success of treason upon incest.

Profane hearts do so contrive the plots of their wickedness, as if there were no overruling power to cross their designs, or to revenge them. He that sits in heaven laughs them to scorn, and so far gives way to their sins, as their sins may prove plagues unto themselves.

These two sons of David met with pestilent counsel; Amnon is advised to incest with his sister, Absalom is advised to incest with his father's concubines; that by Jonadab, this by Achitophel; both prevail. It is as easy at least to take ill counsel, as to give it. Proneness to villany in the great, cannot want either projectors to devise, or parasites to execute the most odious sins.

The tent is spread, lest it should not be conspicuous enough, on the top of the house. The act is done in the sight of all Israel. The filthiness of the sin was not so great, as the impudency of the manner. When the prophet Nathan came with that heavy message of reproof and menace to David, after his sin with Bathsheba, he could say from God, "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee, out of thine own house, and will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them to thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun: for thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before this sun." The counsel of Achitophel, and the lust of Absalom, have fulfilled the judgment of God. O the wisdom of the Almighty, that can use the worst evils well; and most justly make the sins of men his executioners!

It was the sin of Reuben that he defiled his father's bed; yet not in the same height of lewdness. What Reuben did in a youthful wantonness, Absalom did in a malicious despite: Reuben sinned with one, Absalom with ten: Reuben secretly, Absalom in the open eyes of heaven and earth; yet old Jacob could say of Reuben, "Thou shalt not excel; thy dignity is gone:" while Achitophel says to Absalom, "Thy dignity shall arise from incest; climb up to thy father's bed, if thou wilt sit in his throne. Achitophel was a politician, Jacob was a prophet; if the one spake from carnal sense, the other from divine revelation. Certainly, to sin is not the way to prosper: whatever vain fools promise to themselves, there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord.

After the rebellion is secured for continuance, the next care is, that it may end in victory; this also hath the working head of Achitophel projected. Wit and experience told him, that, in these cases of assault, celerity uses to bring forth the happiest despatch; whereas protraction is no small advantage to the defendent. "Let me (saith he) choose out now twelve thousand men, and I will up, and follow after David this night; and I will come upon him when he is weary and weak-handed." No advice could be more pernicious; for, besides the weariness and unreadiness of David and his army, the spirits of that worthy leader were daunted, and dejected with sorrow, and offered way to the violence of a sudden assault. The field had been half won ere any blow stricken. Achitophel could not have been reputed so wise, if he had not learned the due proportion betwixt actions and times. He that observeth every wind shall never sow; but he that observes no wind at all shall never reap.

The likeliest devices do not always succeed. The God that had appointed to establish David's throne, and determined Solomon to his succession, finds means to cross the plot of Achitophel by a less probable advice. Hushai was not sent back for nothing. Where God hath, in his secret will, decreed any event, he inclines the wills of men to approve that which may promote his own purposes. Neither had Hushai so deep a head, neither was his counsel so sure as that of Achitophel, yet his tongue shall refel Achitophel, and divert Absalom. The pretences were fairer, though the grounds were unsound; first, to sweeten his opposition, he yields the praise of wisdom to his adversary in all other counsels, that he may have leave to deny it in this; his very contradiction in the present, insinuates a general allowance. Then he suggests certain apparent truths concerning David's valour and skill, to give countenance to the inferences of his improbabilites. Lastly, he cunningly feeds the proud humour of Absalom, in magnifying the power and extent of his commands, and ends in the glorious boasts of his forepromised victory. As it is with faces, so with counsel, that is fair that pleaseth. He that gives the utterance to words, gives also their speed. Favour, both of speech and men, is not ever according to desert, but according to foreordination. The tongue of Hushai, and the heart of Absalom, is guided by a power above their own; Hushai shall therefore prevail with Absalom, that the treason of Absalom may not prevail. He that worketh all in all things, so disposeth of wicked men and spirits, that, while they do most oppose his revealed will, they execute his secret, and, while they think most to please, they overthrow themselves.

When Absalom first met Hushai, returned to Jerusalem, he upbraided him pleasantly with the scoff of his professed friendship to David, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" Sometimes there is more truth in the mouth than in the heart, more in jest than in earnest. Hushai was a friend, his stay was his kindness; and now he hath done that for which he was left at Jerusalem, disappointed Achitophel, preserved David; neither did his kindness to his friend rest here, but, as one that was justly jealous of him with whom he was allowed to temporise, he mistrusts the approbation of Absalom; and, not daring to put the life of his master upon such a hazard, he gives charge to Zadok and Abiathar of this intelligence unto David. We cannot be too suspicious, when we have to do with those that are faithless. We cannot be too curious of the safety of good princes.

Hushai fears not to descry the secrets of Absalom's counsel: to betray a traitor is no other than a commendable work. Zadok and Abiathar, are fast within the gates of Jerusalem; their sons lay purposely abroad in the fields; this message, that concerned no less than the life of David, and the whole kingdom of Israel, must be trusted with a maid. Sometimes it pleaseth the wisdom of God, who hath the variety of heaven and earth before him, to single out weak instruments for great services; and they shall serve his turn, as well as the best No counsellor of state could have made this despatch more effectual: Jonathan and Ahimaaz are sent, descried, pursued, preserved. The fidelity of a maid instructed them in their message, the subtilty of a woman saved their lives. At the well of Rogel they received their message, in the well of Bahurim was their life saved: the sudden wit of a woman hath choked the mouth of her well with dried corn, that it might not bewray the messengers; and now David hears safely of his danger, and prevents it; and, though weary with travel, and laden with sorrow, he must spend the night in his remove. God's promises of his deliverance, and the confirmation of his kingdom, may not make him neglect the means of his safety. If he be faithful we may not be careless, since our diligence and care are appointed for the factors of that divine Providence: the acts of God must abate nothing of ours; rather must we labour, by doing that which he requireth to further that which he decreeth.

There are those that have great wits for the public, none for themselves. Such was Achitophel, who, while he had power to govern a state, could not tell how to rule his own passions: never till now do we find his counsel baulked, neither was it now rejected as ill, only Hushai's was allowed for better: he can live no longer now, that he is beaten at his own weapon; this alone is cause enough to saddle his ass, and to go home, and put the halter about his own neck. Pride causes men both to misinterpret disgraces, and to overrate them. Now is David's prayer heard, "Achitophel's counsel is turned into foolishness." Desperate Achitophel, what if thou be not the wisest man of all Israel? even those that have not attained to the highest pitch of wisdom have found contentment in a mediocrity: what if thy counsel were despised? A wise man knows to live happily, in spite of an unjust contempt: what madness is this, to revenge another man's reputation upon thyself! and, while thou strivest for the highest room of wisdom, to run into the grossest extremity of folly! Wordly wisdom is no protection from shame and ruin. How easily may a man, though naturally wise, be made weary of life. A little pain, a little shame, a little loss, a small affront, can soon rob a man of all comfort, and cause his own hands to rob him of himself. If there be not higher respects than the world can yield, to maintain us in being, it should be a miracle if indignation did not kill more than disease. Now, that God, by whose appointment we live here, for his most wise and holy purposes, hath found means to make life sweet, and death terrible.

What a mixture do we find here of wisdom and madness! Achitophel will needs hang himself; there is madness: he will yet set his house in order; there is an act of wisdom. And could it be possible that he, who was so wise as to set his house in order, should be so mad as to hang himself? that he should be careful to order his house, who regarded not to order his impotent passions? that he should care for his house, who cared not for either body or soul? How vain it is for a man to be wise, if he be not wise in God? How preposterous are the cares of idle wordlings, that prefer all other things to themselves, and, while they look at what they have in their coffers, forget what they have in their breasts!

CONTEMPLATION III.—THE DEATH OF ABSALOM.

THE same God that raised enmity to David from his own loins, procured him favour from foreigners; strangers shall relieve him, whom his own son persecutes: here is not a loss, but an exchange of love. Had Absalom been a son of Ammon, and Shobi a son of David, David had found no cause of complaint. If God takes with one hand, he gives with another; while that divine bounty serves us in good meat, though not in our own dishes, we have good reason to be thankful. No sooner is David come to Mahanaim, than Barzillai, Machir, and Shobi refresh him with provisions. Who ever saw any child of God left utterly destitute? Whosoever be the messenger of our aid, we know whence he comes; heaven shall want power, and earth means, before any of the household of faith shall want maintenance.

He, that formerly was forced to employ his arms for his defence against a tyrannous father-in-law, must now buckle them on against an unnatural son: now therefore he musters his men and ordains his commanders, and marshals his troops; and since their loyal importunity will not allow the hazard of his person, he at once encourages them by his eye, and restrains them with his tongue, "Deal gently with the young man Absalom for my sake." How unreasonably favourable are the wars of a father! O holy David, what means this ill-placed love, this unjust mercy? Deal gently with a traitor! but of all traitors with a son! of all sons with an Absalom, the graceless darling of so good a father! and all this for my sake, whose crown, whose blood he hunts after! For whose sake should Absalom be pursued, if he must be forborne for thine? He was still courteous to thy followers, affable to suitors, plausible to all Israel, only to thee he is cruel. Wherefore are those arms, if the cause of the quarrel must be a motive of mercy? Yet thou sayest, "Deal gently with the young man Absalom for my sake." Even in the holiest parents, nature may be guilty of an injurious tenderness, of a bloody indulgence.

Or, whether shall we not rather think this was done in type of that unmeasurable mercy of the true King and Redeemer of Israel who prayed for his persecutors, for his murderers? and even while they were at once scorning and killing him, could say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." If we be sons, we are ungracious, we are rebellious, yet still is our heavenly Father compassionately regardful of us. David was not sure of his success: there was great inequality in the number: Absalom's forces were more than double to hi ; it might have come to the contrary issue, that David should have been forced to say, "Deal gently with the father of Absalom;" but in a supposition of that victory, which only the goodness of his cause bade him hope for, he saith, "Deal gently with the young man Absalom." As for us we are never but under mercy; our God needs no advantages to sweep us from the earth any moment, yet he continues that life, and those powers to us, whereby we provoke him, and bids his angels deal kindly with us, and bear us in their arms, while we lift up our hands, and bend our tongues against heaven. O mercy past the comprehension of all finite spirits, and only to be conceived by him whose it is! never more resembled by any earthly affection, than by this of his deputy and type, "Deal gently with the young man Absalom for my sake."

The battle is joined; David's followers are but a handful to Absalom's. How easily may the fickle multitude be transported to the wrong side! What they wanted in abettors, is supplied in the cause. Unnatural ambition draws the sword of Absalom, David's a necessary and just defence. They, that in simplicity of heart followed Absalom, cannot in malice of heart persecute the father of Absalom. With what courage could any Israelite draw his sword against a David? or, on the other side, who can want courage to fight for a righteous sovereign and father, against the conspiracy of a wicked son? The God of hosts, with whom it is all one to save with many or with few, takes part with justice, and lets Israel feel what it is to bear arms for a traitorous usurper. The sword devours twenty thousand of them, and the wood devours more than the sword: it must needs be a very universal rebellion, wherein so many perished. What virtue or merits can assure the hearts of the vulgar, when so gracious a prince finds so many revolters? Let no man look to prosper by rebellion: the very thickets, and stakes, and pits, and wild beasts of the wood, shall conspire to the punishment of traitors. Amongst the rest, see how a fatal oak hath singled out the ringleader of this hateful insurrection, and will at once serve for his hangman and gallows, by one of those spreading arms snatching him away to speedy execution. Absalom was comely, and he knew it well enough; his hair was no small piece of his beauty, nor matter of his pride: it was his wont to cut it once a year: not for that it was too long, but too heavy: his heart would have borne it longer, if his neck had not complained; and now the justice of God hath plaited a halter of those locks; those tresses had formerly hanged loosely dishevelled on his shoulders, now he hangs by them. He had wont to weigh his hair, and was proud to find it so heavy; now his hair poiseth the weight of his body, and makes his burden his torment. It is no marvel, if his own hair turned traitor to him who durst rise up against his father. That part, which is misused by man to sin, is commonly employed by God to revenge; the revenge that it worketh for God, makes amends for the offence whereto it is drawn against God; the very beast whereon Absalom sat, as weary to bear so unnatural a burden, resigns over his load to the tree of justice: there hangs Absalom between heaven and earth, as one that was hated and abandoned both of earth and heaven: as if God meant to prescribe this punishment for traitors; Absalom, Achitophel, and Judas die all one death: so let them perish that dare lift up their hand against God's anointed.

The honest soldier sees Absalom hanging in the oak, and dares not touch him; his hands were held with the charge of David. "Beware that none touch the young man Absalom." Joab, upon that intelligence, sees him, and smites him, with no less than three darts. What the soldier forebore in obedience, the captain doth in zeal; not fearing to prefer his sovereign's safety to his command, and more tendering the life of a king, and peace of his country, than the weak affection of a father. I dare not sit judge betwixt his zeal and that obedience, betwixt the captain and the soldier; the one was a good subject, the other a good patriot; the one loved the king, the other loved David, and out of love disobeyed; the one meant as well as the other sped. As if God meant to fulfil the charge of his anointed, without any blame of his subjects, it pleased him to execute that immediate revenge upon the rebel, which would have despatched him without hand or dart; only the mule and the oak conspired to this execution; but that death would have required more leisure, than it was safe for Israel to give, and still life would give hope of rescue; to cut off all fears, Joab lends the oak three darts to help forward so needful a work of justice. All Israel did not afford so firm a friend to Absalom as Joab had been: who, but Joab, had suborned the witty widow of Tekoah, to sue for the recalling of Absalom from his three years' exile? who but he, went to fetch him from Geshur to Jerusalem? who but he, went to fetch him from his house at Jerusalem, whereto he had been two years confined, to the face, to the lips of David? Yet now he, that was his solicitor for the king's favour, is his executioner against the king's charge. With honest hearts all respects, either of blood or friendship, cease in the case of treason; well hath Joab forgotten himself to be a friend to him, who had forgotten himself to be a son. Even, civilly, the king is our common father, our country our common mother; nature hath no private relations, which should not gladly give place to these; he is neither father, nor son, nor brother, nor friend, that conspires against the common parent. Well doth he, who spake parables for his master's son, now speak darts to his king's enemy, and pierces that heart which was false to so great a father. Those darts are seconded by Joab's followers; each man tries his weapon upon so fair a mark. One death is not enough for Absalom, he is at once hanged, shot, mangled, stoned. Justly was he lift up to the oak, who had lift up himself against his father and sovereign; justly is he pierced with darts who had pierced his father's heart with so many sorrows; justly is he mangled, who hath dismembered and divided all Israel; justly is he stoned, who not only cursed, but pursued his own parent.

Now Joab sounds the retreat, and calls off his eager troops from execution, however he knew what his rebellious countrymen had deserved in following an Absalom. Wise commanders know how to put a difference betwixt the heads of a faction and the misguided multitude; and can pity the one while they take revenge on the other.

So did Absalom esteem himself, that he thought it would be a wrong to the world to want the memorial of so goodly a person. God had denied him sons; how just it was that he should want a son, who had robbed his father of a son, who would have robbed himself of a father, his father of a kingdom! It had been pity so poisonous a plant should have been fruitful: his pride shall supply nature, he rears up a stately pillar in the king's dale, and calls it by his own name, that he might live in dead stones, who could not survive in living issue; and now behold this curious pile ends in a rude heap, which speaks no language but the shame of that carcass which it covers. Hear this, ye glorious fools, that care not to perpetuate any memory of yourselves to the world, but of ill-deserving greatness; the best of this affectation is vanity; the worst, infamy and dishonour; whereas the memorial of the just shall be blessed: and if his humility shall refuse an epitaph, and choose to hide himself under the bare earth, God himself shall engrave his name upon the pillar of eternity.

There now lies Absalom in the pit, under a thousand grave-stones, in every of which is written his everlasting reproach. Well might this heap overlive that pillar; for when that ceased to be a pillar, it began to be a heap, neither will it cease to be a monument of Absalom's shame, while there are stones to be found upon earth. Even at this day, very pagans and pilgrims that pass that way, cast each man a stone unto that heap, and are wont to say in a solemn execration, Cursed be the parricide Absalom, and cursed be all unjust persecutors of their parents, for ever. Fasten your eyes upon this woeful spectacle, O all ye rebellious and ungracious children, which rise up against the loins and thighs from which ye fell; and know that it is the least part of your punishment, that your carcasses rot in the earth, and your name in ignominy; these do but shadow out those eternal sufferings of your souls, for your foul and unnatural disobedience.

Absalom is dead: who shall report it to his father? Surely Joab was not so much afraid of the fact, as of the message. There are busy spirits that love to carry news, though thankless, though purposeless; such was Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, who importunately thrust himself into this service: wise Joab, who well saw how unwelcome tidings must be the burden of the first post, dissuades him in vain: he knew David too well, to employ a friend to that errand. An Ethiopian servant was a fitter bearer of such a message than the son of the priest. The entertainment of the person doth so follow the quality of the news, that David could argue afar off, "He is a good man, he cometh with good tidings." O how welcome deserve those messengers to be, that bring us the glad tidings of salvation, that assure us of the foil of all spiritual enemies, and tell us of nothing but victories, and crowns, and kingdoms! If we think not their feet beautiful, our hearts are foul with infidelity and secure worldliness.

So wise is Ahimaaz grown by Joab's intimation, that though he outwent Cushi in his pace, he suffers Cushi to out-go him in his tale, cunningly suppressing that part which he knew must be both necessarily delivered, and unpleasingly received.

As our care is wont to be where our love is, David's first word is not, how fares the host? but, "How fares the young man Absalom?" Like a wise and faithful messenger, Cushi answers by an honest insinuation, "The enemies of my Lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is;" implying both what was done, and why David should approve it being done. How is the good king thunder-struck with that word of his blackmoor; who, as if he were at once bereaved of all comfort, and cared not to live but in the name of Absalom, goes, and weeps, and cries out, "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee! O Absalom, my son, my son!" What is this we hear? that he, whose life Israel valued at ten thousand of theirs, should be exchanged with a traitor's: that a good king, whose life was sought, should wish to lay it down for the preservation of his murderer. The best men have not wont to be the least passionate. But what shall we say to that love of thine, O Saviour, who hast said of us wretched traitors, not "Would God I had died for you;" but I will die, I do die, I have died for you. O love, like thyself, infinite, incomprehensible, whereat the angels of heaven stand yet amazed, wherewith thy saints are ravished! "Turn away thine eyes from me, for they overcome me. O thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cause us to hear it;" that we may in our measure answer thy love, and enjoy it for ever.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—SHEBA'S REBELLION.

It was the doom which God passed upon the man after his own heart, by the mouth of Nathan, that the sword should never depart from his house, for the blood of Uriah: after that wound healed by remission, yet this scar remains. Absalom is no sooner cast down into the pit, than Sheba the son of Bichri is up in arms: if David be not plagued, yet he shall be corrected; first by the rod of a son, then of a subject. He had lifted up his hands against a faithful subject; now a faithless dares to lift up his hand against him. Malice, like some hereditary sickness, runs in the blood; Saul and Shimei, and Sheba, were all of an house; that ancient grudge was not yet dead: the fire of the house of Jemini was but raked up, never thoroughly out; and now that, which did but smoke in Shimei, flames in Sheba; although, even through this chastisement, it is not hard to discern a type of that perpetual succession of enmity, which should be raised against the true King of Israel. O son of David, when didst thou ever want enemies! How wert thou designed by thine eternal Father, for a sign that should be spoken against! "How did the Gentiles rage, and the people imagine vain things! The kings of the earth assembled, and the rulers came together against thee." Yea, how do the subjects of thine own kingdom daily conspire against thee! Even now, while thou enjoyest peace and glory at thy Father's right hand, as soon shalt thou want friends as enemies upon earth.

No eye of any traitor could espy a just quarrel in the government of David; yet Sheba blows the trumpet of rebellion; and while Israel and Judah are striving who should have the greatest part in their re-established sovereign, he sticks not to say, "We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse;" and while he says, "Every man to his tents, O Israel," he calls every man to his own; so, in proclaiming a liberty from a just and loyal subjection, he invites Israel to the bondage of an usurper.

That a lewd conspirator should breathe treason, it is no wonder; but is it not wonder and shame, that upon every mutinous blast, Israel should turn traitor to God's anointed? It was their late expostulation with David, why their brethren, the men of Judah, should have stolen *him* from them. Now might David more justly expostulate, why a rebel of their brethren should have stolen them from him. As nothing is more instable than the multitude, so nothing is more subject to distastes than sovereignty; for as weak minds seek pleasure in change, so every light conceit of irritation seems sufficient colour of change: such the false dispositions of the vulgar are! Love cannot be security enough for princes without the awfulness of power: what hold can there be of popularity, when the same hands, that even now fought for David to be *all theirs*, now fight against him, under the son of Bichri, as none of theirs? As bees, when they are once up in a swarm, are ready to light upon every bough; so the Israelites, being stirred by the late commotion of Absalom, are apt to follow every Sheba. It is unsafe for any state, that the multitude should once know the way to an insurrection; the least track in this kind is easily made a path. Yet, if Israel rebel, Judah continues faithful; neither shall the son of David ever be left destitute of some true subjects in the worst of apostasies. He, that could command all hearts, will ever be followed by some: God had rather glorify himself by a remnant.

Great commanders must have active thoughts: David is not so taken up with the embroiled affairs of his state, as not to intend domestic justice. His ten concubines, which were shamelessly defiled by his incestuous son, are condemned to ward and widowhood. Had not that constupration been partly violent, their punishment had not been so easy; had it not also been partly voluntarily, they had not been so much punished; but how much soever the act did partake of either force or will, justly are they sequestered from David's bed. Absalom was not more unnatural in his rebellion than in his lust; if now David should have returned to his own bed, he had seconded the incest. How much more worthy of separation are they, who have stained the marriage-bed with their wilful sin!

Amasa was one of the witnesses and abettors of Absalom's filthiness; yet is he, out of policy, received to favour and employment, while the concubines suffer. Great men yield many times to those things, out of reasons of state, which, if they were private persons, could not be easily put over. It is no small wisdom to engage a new reconciled friend, that he may be confirmed by his own act: therefore is Amasa commanded to levy the forces of Judah. Joab, after many great merits and achievements, lies rusting in neglect; he, that was so entire with David, as to be of his counsel for Uriah's blood, and so firm to David, as to lead all his battles against the house of Saul, the Ammonites, the Aramites, Absalom, is now cashiered, and must yield this place to a stranger, late an enemy. Who knows not that this son of Zeruiah had shed the blood of war in peace? But if the blood of Absalom had not been louder than the blood of Abner, I fear this change had not been. Now Joab smarted for a loyal disobedience. How slippery are the stations of earthly honours and subject to continual mutability! Happy are they who are in favour with Him, in whom there is no shadow of change!

Where men are commonly most ambitious to please with their first employments, Amasa slackens his pace. The least delay in matters of rebellion, is perilous, may be irrecoverable. The sons of Zeruiah are not sullen; Abishai is sent, Joab goes unsent to the pursuit of Sheba. Amasa was in their way, whom no quarrel but their envy had made of a brother an enemy. Had the heart of Amasa been privy to any cause of grudge, he had suspected the kiss of Joab; now his innocent eyes look to the lips, not to the hand of his secret enemy: the lips were smooth; "Art thou in health, my brother?" The hand was bloody, which smote him under the fifth rib; that unhappy hand knew well this way unto death, which with one wound hath let out the souls of two great captains, Abner and Amasa; both they were smitten by Joab, both under the fifth rib, both under a pretence of friendship. There is no enmity so dangerous as that which comes masked with love. Open hostility calls us to our guard; but there is no fence against a trusted treachery. We need not be bidden to avoid an enemy; but who would run away from a friend? Thus spiritually deals the world with our souls, it kisses us and stabs us at once: if it did not embrace us with one hand, it could not murder us with the other: only God deliver us from the danger of our trust, and we shall be safe.

Joab is gone, and leaves Amasa wallowing in blood; that spectacle cannot but stay all passengers. The death of great persons draws ever many eyes: each man says, "Is not this my lord Amasa?" Wherefore do we go to fight, while our general lies in the dust? What a sad presage is this of our own miscarriage! The wit of Joab's followers hath therefore soon both removed Amasa out of the way, and covered him, not regarding so much the loss, as the eye-sore of Israel. Thus wicked politics care not so much for the commission of villany, as for the notice. Smothered evils are as not done: if oppressions, if murder, if treasons may be hid from view, the obdured heart of the offender complains not of remorse.

Bloody Joab, with what face, with what heart canst thou pursue a traitor to thy king, while thou thyself art so foul a traitor to thy friend, to thy cousin-german, and, in so unseasonable a slaughter, to thy sovereign, whose cause thou professest to revenge? If Amasa were now in an act of loyalty, justly, on God's part, paid for the arrearages of his late rebellion; yet that it should be done by thy hand, then and thus, it was flagitiously cruel: yet, behold, Joab runs away securely with the fact, hasting to plague that, in another, whereof himself was no less guilty. So vast are the gorges of some consciences, that they can swallow the greatest crimes, and find no strain in the passage.

It is possible for a man to be faithful to some one person, and perfidious to all others. I do not find Joab other than firm and loyal to David, in the midst of all his private falsehoods, whose just quarrel he pursues against Sheba, through all the tribes of Israel. None of all the strong forts of revolted Israel can hide the rebel from the zeal of his revenge. The city of Abel lends harbour to that conspirator, whom all Israel would, and cannot protect. Joab casts up a mount against it, and having environed it with a siege, begins to work upon the wall; and now, after long chase, is in hand to dig out that vermin, which had earthed himself in this borough of Bethmaachah. Had not the city been strong and populous, Sheba had not cast himself for succour within those walls; yet of all the inhabitants, I see not any one man move for the preservation of their whole body: only a woman undertakes to treat with Joab for their safety. Those men, whose spirits were great enough to maintain a traitor against a mighty king, scorn not to give way to the wisdom of a matron: there is no reason that sex should disparage, where the virtue and merit is no less than masculine. Surely the soul acknowledgeth no sex, neither is varied according to the outward frame. How oft have we known female hearts in the breasts of men, and, contrarily, manly powers in the weaker vessels! It is injurious to measure the act by the person, and not rather to esteem the person for the act.

She, with no less prudence than courage, challengeth Joab for the violence of his assault, and lays to him that law, which he could not be an Israelite and disavow: the law of the God of peace, whose charge it was, that, when they should come near to a city to fight against it, they should offer it peace; and if this tender must be made to foreigners, how much more to brethren? So as they must inquire of Abel ere they battered it. War is the extreme act of vindictive justice; neither doth God ever approve it for any other than a desperate remedy, and, if it hath any other end than peace, it turns into public murder. It is therefore an inhuman cruelty to shed blood, where we have not proffered fair conditions of peace, the refusal whereof is justly punished with the sword of revenge.

Joab was a man of blood; yet, when the wise woman of Abel charged him with going about to destroy a mother in Israel, and swallowing up the inheritance of the Lord, with what vehemence doth he deprecate that challenge! "God forbid, God forbid it me, that I should devour or destroy it." Although that city, with the rest, had engaged itself in Sheba's sedition, yet how zealously doth Joab remove from himself the suspicion of an intended vastation! How fearful shall their answer be, who upon the quarrel of their own ambition, have not spared to waste whole tribes of the Israel of God! It was not the fashion of David's captains to assault any city ere they summoned it: here they did. There be some things that in the very fact, carry their own conviction; so did Abel in the entertaining and abetting a known conspirator: Joab challenges them for the offence, and requires no other satisfaction than the head of Sheba. This matron had not deserved the name of wise and faithful in Israel, if she had not both apprehended the justice of the condition, and commended it to her citizens, whom she had easily persuaded to spare their own heads, in not sparing a traitor's. It had been pity those walls should have stood, if they had been too high to throw a traitor's head over.

Spiritually the case is ours: every man's breast is as a city inclosed; every sin is as a traitor that lurks within those walls; God calls to us for Sheba's head; neither hath he any quarrel to our person, but for our sin. If we love the head of our traitor above the life of our soul, we shall justly perish in the vengeance. We cannot be more willing to part with our sin, than our merciful God is to withdraw his judgments.

Now is Joab returned with success, and hopes, by Sheba's head, to pay the price of Amasa's blood; David hates the murder, entertains the man, defers the revenge; Joab had made himself so great, so necessary, that David may neither miss nor punish him. Policy led the king to connive at that which his heart abhorred. I dare not commend that wisdom which holds the hands of princes from doing justice. Great men have ever held it a point of wordly state, not always to pay where they have been conscious to a debt of either favour or punishment; but to make time their servant for both. Solomon shall once defray the arrearages of his father. In the mean time Joab commands and prospers, and David is fain to smile on that face, whereon he hath, in his secret destination, written the characters of death.

CONTEMPLATION V.—THE GIBEONITES REVENGED.

The reign of David was most troublesome towards the shutting up, wherein both war and famine conspire to afflict him: almost forty years had he sat in the throne of Israel with competency, if not abundance of all things; now at last are his people visited with a long dearth: we are not at first sensible of common evils. Three years' drought and scarcity are gone over, ere David consults with God, concerning the occasion of the judgment; now he found it high time to seek the face of the Lord. The continuance of an affliction sends us to God, and calls upon us to ask for a reckoning; whereas, like men stricken in their sleep, a sudden blow cannot make us to find ourselves, but rather astonisheth than teacheth us.

David was himself a prophet of God, yet had not the Lord, all this while, acquainted him with the grounds of his proceedings against Israel; this secret was hid from him, till he consulted with the Urim; ordinary means shall reveal that to him which no vision had descried; and if God will have prophets to have recourse unto the priests, for the notice of his will, how much more must the people? Even those that are inwardest with God must have the use of the ephod.

Justly it is presupposed by David, that there was never judgment from God, where hath not been a provocation from men; therefore, when he sees the plague, he inquires for the sin. Never man smarted causelessly from the hand of divine justice. O that, when we suffer, we could ask what we have done, and could guide our repentance to the root of our evils!

That God, whose counsels are secret, even where his actions are open, will not be close to his prophet, to his priest: without inquiry we shall know nothing; upon inquiry nothing shall be concealed from us, that is fit for us to know.

Who can choose but wonder at once, both at David's slackness in consulting with God, and God's speed in answering so slow a demand? He, that so well knew the way to God's oracle, suffers Israel to be three years pinched with famine, ere he asks why they suffer. Even the best hearts may be overtaken with dulness in holy duties; but O the marvellous mercy of God, that takes not the advantage of our weaknesses! David's question is not more slow, than his answer is speedy: "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." Israel was full of sins, besides those of Saul's house; Saul's house was full of sins, besides those of blood; much blood was shed by them, besides that of the Gibeonites; yet the justice of God singles out this one sin of violence offered to the Gibeonites contrary to the league made by Joshua, some four hundred years before, for the occasion of this late vengeance. Where the causes of offence are infinite, it is just with God to pitch upon some; it is merciful not to punish for all: well near forty years are past betwixt the commission of the sin, and the reckoning for it. It is a vain hope that is raised from the delay of judgment: no time can be any prejudice to the Ancient of days: when we have forgotten our sins, when the world hath forgotten us, he sues us afresh for our arrearages. The slaughter of the Gibeonites was the sin not of the present, but rather of the former generation; and now posterity pays for their forefathers. Even we men hold it not unjust to sue the heirs and executors of our debitors: eternal payments God uses only to require of the persons, temporary ofttimes of succession.

As Saul was higher by the head and shoulders than the rest of Israel, both in stature and dignity, so were his sins more conspicuous than those of the vulgar. The eminence of the person makes the offence more remarkable to the eyes both of God and men.

Neither Saul nor Israel were faultless in other kinds: yet God fixes the eye of his revenge upon the massacre of the Gibeonites. Every sin hath a tongue, but that of blood overcries and drowns the rest. He, who is mercy itself, abhors cruelty in his creature above all other inordinateness: that holy soul, which was heavy pressed with the weight of a heinous adultery, yet cries out, "Deliver me from blood, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall joyfully sing of thy righteousness."

If God would take account of blood, he might have entered the action upon the blood of Uriah spilt by David; or, if he would rather insist in Saul's house, upon the blood of Abimelech the priest, and fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod: but it pleased the wisdom and justice of the Almighty, rather to call for the blood of the Gibeonites, though drudges of Israel, and a remnant of Amorites. Why this? There was a perjury attending upon this slaughter; it was an ancient oath wherein the princes of the congregation had bound themselves, upon Joshua's league, to the Gibeonites, that they would suffer them to live; an oath extorted by fraud, but solemn, by no less name than the Lord God of Israel. Saul will now, thus late, either not acknowledge it, or not keep it; out of his zeal therefore to the children of Israel and Judah, he roots out some of the Gibeonites, whether in a zeal of revenge of their first imposture, or in a zeal of enlarging the possessions of Israel, or in a zeal of executing God's charge upon the brood of Canaanites: he that spared Agag, whom he should have smitten, smites the Gibeonites, whom he should have spared. Zeal and good intention is no excuse, much less a warrant for evil: God holds it a high indignity that his name should be sworn by, and violated. Length of time cannot dispense with our oaths, with our vows; the vows and oaths of others may bind us; how much more our own?

There was a famine in Israel: a natural man would have ascribed it unto the drought, and that drought, perhaps, to some constellations: David knows to look higher, and sees a divine hand scourging Israel for some great offence, and overruling those second causes to his most just executions. Even the most quick-sighted worldling is purblind to spiritual objects, and the weakest eyes of the regenerate pierce the heavens, and espy God in all earthly occurrences.

So well was David acquainted with God's proceedings, that he knew, the removal of the judgment must begin at the satisfaction of the wronged. At once therefore doth he pray unto God, and treat with the Gibeonites; "What shall I do for you, and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that I may bless the inheritance of the Lord?" In vain should David, though a prophet, bless Israel, if the Gibeonites did not bless them. Injuries done us on earth gives us power in heaven; the oppressor is in no man's mercy, but his whom he hath trampled upon.

Little did the Gibeonites think, that God had so taken to heart their wrongs, that, for their sakes, all Israel should suffer. Even, when we think not of it, is the righteous Judge avenging our unrighteous vexations. Our hard measures cannot be hid from him; his returns are hid from us. It is sufficient for us, that God can be no more neglective than ignorant of our sufferings. It is now in the power of these despised Hivites to make their own terms with Israel: neither silver nor gold will favour with them towards their satisfaction: nothing can expiate the blood of their fathers, but the blood of seven sons of their deceased persecutor. Here was no other than a just retaliation: Saul had punished in them the offence of their predecessors: they will now revenge Saul's sin in his children. The measure we mete unto others, is, with much equity, remeasured unto ourselves. Every death would not content them of Saul's sons, but a cursed and ignominious hanging on the tree; neither would that death content them, unless their own hands might be the executioners: neither would any place serve for the execution but Gibeah, the court of Saul; neither would they do any of this for the wrecking of their own fury, but for the appeasing of God's wrath, "We will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul."

David might not refuse the condition: he must deliver, they must execute; he chooses out seven of the sons and grandchildren of Saul. That house had raised long an unjust persecution against David, now God pays it upon another's score. David's love and oath to Jonathan preserves lame Mephibosheth; how much more shall the Father of all mercies do good unto the children of the faithful, for the covenant made with their parents!

The five sons of Adriel the Meholathite, David's ancient rival in his first love, which were born to him by Merab, Saul's daughter, and brought up by her barren sister Michal, the wife of David, are yielded up to death; Merab was, after a promise of marriage to David, unjustly given away by Saul to Adriel; Michal seems to abet the match, in breeding the children; now, in one act, not of David's seeking, the wrong is thus late avenged upon Saul, Adriel, Merab, Michal, the children. It is a dangerous matter to offer injury to any of God's faithful ones; if their meekness have easily remitted it, their God will not pass it over without a severe retribution.

These five, together with two sons of Rizpah, Saul's concubine, are hanged up at once before the Lord, yea, and before the eyes of the world; no place but a hill will serve for this execution. The acts of justice, as they are intended for example, so they should be done in that eminent fashion, that may make them both most instructive, and most terrifying; unwarrantable courses of private revenge seek to hide their heads in secrecy; the beautiful face of justice both affects the light, and becomes it.

It was the general charge of God's law, that no corpse should remain all night upon the gibbet; the Almighty hath power to dispense with his own command; so doubtless he did in this extraordinary case; these carcasses did not defile but expiate. Sorrowful Rizpah spreads her a tent of sackloth upon the rock, for a sad attendance upon those sons of her womb; death might bereave her of them, not them of her love. This spectacle was not more grievous to her than pleasing to God, and happy to Israel. Now the clouds drop fatness and the earth runs forth into plenty. The Gibeonites are satisfied, God reconciled, Israel relieved.

How blessed a thing it is for any nation, that justice is unpartially executed, even upon the mighty! A few drops of blood have procured large showers from heaven. A few carcasses are a rich compost to the earth; the drought and dearth remove away with the breath of those pledges of the offender: judgment cannot tyrannize where justice reigns: as, contrarily, there can be no peace where blood cries unheard, unregarded.

CONTEMPLATION VI.—THE NUMBERING OF THE PEOPLE.

ISRAEL was grown wanton and mutinous; God pulls them down, first by the sword, then by famine, now by pestilence. O the wondrous, and yet just ways of the Almighty! Because Israel hath sinned, therefore David shall sin, that Israel may be punished; because God is angry with Israel, therefore David shall anger him more, and strike himself in Israel, and Israel through himself.

The Spirit of God elsewhere ascribes this motion to Satan, which here it attributes to God; both had their hand in the work; God by permission, Satan by suggestion; God as a judge, Satan as an enemy; God as in a just punishment for sin, Satan as in an act of sin; God in a wise ordination of it to good, Satan in a malicious intent of confusion. Thus at once God moved, and Satan moved; neither is it any excuse to Satan or David that God moved; neither is it any blemish to God, that Satan moved; the ruler's sin is a punishment to a wicked people; though they had many sins of their own, whereon God might have grounded a judgment, yet, as before, he had punished them with dearth for Saul's sin, so now he will not punish them with plagues, but for David's sin. If God were not angry with a people, he would not give up their governors to such evils, as whereby he is provoked to vengeance; and if their governors be thus given up, the people cannot be safe. The body drowns not while the head is above the water, when that once sinks, death is near; justly therefore are we charged to make prayers and supplications, as for all, so especially for those that are in eminent authority; when we pray for ourselves, we pray not always for them; but we cannot pray for them, and not pray for ourselves. The public weal is not comprised in the private, but the private, in the public.

What then was David's sin? He will needs have Israel and Judah numbered. Surely there is no malignity in numbers: neither is it unfit for a prince to know his own strength; this is not the first time that Israel had gone under a reckoning. The act offends not, but the misaffection; the same thing had been commendably done out of a princely providence, which now through the curiosity, pride, misconfidence of the doer, proves heinously vicious. Those actions, which are in themselves indifferent, receive either their life or their bane from the intentions of the agent. Moses numbereth the people with thanks, David with displeasure. Those sins, which carry the smoothest foreheads, and have the most honest appearances, may more provoke the wrath of God, than those which bear the most abomination in their faces. How many thousand wickednesses passed through the hands of Israel, which we men would rather have branded out for judgment, than this of David's! The righteous judge of the world censures sins, not by their ill looks, but by their foul hearts.

Who can but wonder to see Joab the saint, and David the trespasser? No prophet could speak better than that man of blood; "The Lord thy God increase the people a hundred-fold more than they be, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it; but why doth my lord the king desire this thing?" There is no man so lewd as not to be sometimes in good moods, as not to dislike some evil; contrarily, no man on earth can be so holy, as not sometimes to overlash. It were pity that either Joab or David should be tried by every act. How commonly have we seen those men ready to give good advice to others, for the avoiding of some sins, who, in more gross outrages, have not had grace to counsel their own hearts! The same man, that had deserved death from David for his treacherous cruelty, dissuades David from an act that carried but a suspicion of evil; it is not so much to be regarded, who is it that admonisheth us, as what he brings. Good counsel is never the worse for the foul carriage. There are some dishes that we may eat even from sluttish hands.

The purpose of sin in a faithful man is odious, much more the resolution. Notwithstanding Joab's discreet admonition, David will hold on his course, and will know the number of the people, only that he may know it. Joab and the captains address themselves to the work. In things which are not in themselves evil, it is not for subjects to dispute, but to obey. That which authority may sin in commanding, is done of the inferior, not with safety only, but with praise. Nine months and twenty days is this general muster in hand; at last the number is brought in, Israel is found eight hundred thousand strong; Judah five hundred thousand; the ordinary companies which served by course for the royal guard, four and twenty thousand each month, needed not be reckoned; the addition of them, with their several captains, raises the sum of Israel to the rate of eleven hundred thousand. A power able to puff up a carnal heart; but how can a heart that is more than flesh trust to an arm of flesh? O holy David, whither hath a glorious vanity transported thee! Thou which once didst sing so sweetly, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, for there is no help in him. His breath departeth, and he returneth to his earth, then his thoughts perish. Blessed is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." How canst thou now stoop to so unsafe and unworthy a confidence?

As some stomachful horse that will not be stopt in his career with the sharpest bit, but runs on headly, till he come to some wall or ditch, and there stands still and trembles; so did David: all the dissuasions of Joab could not restrain him from his intended course; almost ten months doth he run on impetuously in a way of his own, rough and dangerous; at last his heart smites him; the conscience of his offence, and the fear of judgment, have fetched him upon his knees: "O Lord, I have sinned exceedingly in that I have done; therefore now Lord, I beseech thee, take away the trespass of thy servant, for I have done very foolishly." It is possible for a sin not to bait only, but to sojourn in the holiest soul: but, though it sojourn there as a stranger, it shall not dwell there as an owner. The renewed heart, after some rovings of error, will once, ere over-long, return home to itself, and fall out with that ill guide wherewith it was misled, and with itself for being misled; and now it is resolved into tears, and breathes forth nothing but sighs, and confessions, and deprecations.

Here needed no Nathan, by a parabolical circumlocution, to fetch in David to a sight and acknowledgment of his sin: the heart of the penitent supplied the prophet; no other tongue could smite him so deep as his own thoughts: but though his reins chastised him in the night, yet his seer scourges him in the morning; "Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things, choose thee which of them I shall do unto thee." But what shall we say to this? When upon the prophet's reproof, for an adultery cloaked with murder, David did but say, "I have sinned," it was presently returned, "God hath put away thy sin;" neither did any smart follow, but the death of a misbegotten infant; and now, when he voluntarily reproved himself for but a needless muster, and sought for pardon unbidden, with great humiliation, God sends him three terrible scourges, famine, sword, or pestilence; that he may choose with which of them he had rather to bleed, he shall have the favour of an election, not of a remission. God is more angered with a spiritual and immediate affront offered to his majesty, in our pride and false confidence in earthly things, than with a fleshly crime, though heinously seconded.

It was a hard and woeful choice, of three years' famine added to three fore-past: or of three months' flight from the sword of an enemy, or three days' pestilence: the Almighty, that had fore-determined his judgment, refers it to David's will as fully as if it were utterly undetermined. God had resolved, yet David may choose: that infinite wisdom hath foreseen the very will of his creature; which while it freely inclines itself to what it had rather, unwittingly wills that which was fore-appointed in heaven.

We do well believe thee, O David, that thou wert in a wonderful strait; this very liberty is no other than fetters; thou needest not have famine, thou needest not have the sword, thou needest not have pestilence: one of them thou must have: there is misery in all, there is misery in any; thou and thy people can die but once; and once they must die, either by famine, war, or pestilence. O God, how vainly do we hope to pass over our sins with impunity, when all the favour that David and Israel can receive, is to choose their bane!

Yet behold, neither sins, nor threats, nor fears, can bereave a true penitent of his faith; "Let us fall now into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great." There can be no evil of punishment wherein God hath not a hand; there could be no famine, no sword, without him: but some evils are more immediate from a divine stroke; such was that plague into which David is unwillingly willing to fall. He had his choice of days, months, years, in the same number; and though the shortness of time, prefixed to the threatened pestilence, might seem to offer some advantage for the leading of his election; yet God meant, and David knew it, herein to proportion the difference of time to the violence of the plague; neither should any fewer perish by so few days' pestilence, than by so many years' famine. The wealthiest might avoid the dearth, the swiftest might run away from the sword; no man could promise himself safety from that pestilence. In likelihood, God's angel would rather strike the most guilty; however therefore David might well look to be enwrapped in the common destruction, yet he rather chooseth to fall into that mercy which he had abused, and to suffer from that justice which he had provoked: "Let us now fall into the hands of the Lord."

Humble confessions and devout penance cannot always avert temporal judgments: God's angel is abroad, and, within that short compass of time, sweeps away seventy thousand Israelites. David was proud of the number of his subjects; now they are abated, that he may see cause of humiliation in the matter of his glory. In what we have offended, we commonly smart. These thousands of Israel were not so innocent, that they should only perish for David's sin: their sins were the motives both of this sin and punishment; besides the respect of David's offence, they die for themselves.

It was no ordinary pestilence that was thus suddenly and universally mortal. Common eyes saw the botch and the marks, but not the angel: David's clearer sight hath espied him, after that killing peragration throughout the tribes of Israel, shaking his sword over Jerusalem, and hovering over Mount Sion; and now he, who doubtless had spent those three dismal days in the saddest contrition, humbly casts himself down at the feet of the avenger, and lays himself ready for the fatal stroke of justice: it was more terror that God intended in the visible shape of his angel, and deeper humiliation; and what he meant, he wrought. Never soul could be more dejected, more anguished with the sense of a judgment, in the bitterness whereof he cries out, "Behold, I have sinned, yea, I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house." The better any man is, the more sensible he is of his own wretchedness. Many of those sheep were wolves to David. What had they done? They had done that which was the occasion of David's sin, and the cause of their own punishment: but that gracious penitent knew his own sin, he knew not theirs; and therefore can say, "I have sinned, what have they done?" It is safe accusing, where we may be boldest, and are best acquainted ourselves.

O the admirable charity of David, that would have engrossed the plague to himself, and his house, from the rest of Israel, and sues to interpose himself betwixt his people and the vengeance; he that had put himself upon the paws of the bear and lion, for the rescue of his sheep, will now cast himself upon the sword of the angel, for the preservation of Israel. There was hope in those conflicts; in this yieldance there could be nothing but death. Thus didst thou, O Son of David, the true and great Shepherd of thy church, offer thyself to death for them who had their hands in thy blood, who both procured thy death, and deserved their own. Here he offered himself, that had sinned, for those whom he professed to have not done evil; thou that didst no sin, vouchsafest to offer thyself for us that were all sin: he offered and escaped, thou offeredst and diedst; and by thy death we live, and are freed from everlasting destruction.

But, O Father of all mercies, how little pleasure dost thou take in the blood of sinners! It was thine own pity that inhibited the destroyer. Ere David could see the angel, thou hadst restrained him. "It is sufficient, hold now thy hand." If thy compassion did not both withhold and abridge thy judgments, what place were there for us out of hell?

How easy and just had it been for God, to have made the shutting up of that third evening red with blood! His goodness repents of the slaughter, and calls for that sacrifice wherewith he will be appeased. An altar must be built in the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite; lo, in that very hill, where the angel held the sword of Abraham from killing his son, doth God now hold the sword of the angel from killing his people! Upon this very ground shall the temple after stand; here shall be the holy altar, which shall send up the acceptable oblations of God's people in succeeding generations.

O God, what was the threshing-floor of a Jebusite to thee above all other soils? what virtue, what merit was in this earth? As in places, so in persons, it is not to be heeded what they are, but what thou wilt; that is worthiest which thou pleasest to accept.

Rich and bountiful Araunah is ready to meet David in so holy a motion, and munificently offers his Sion for the place, his oxen for the sacrifice, his carts and ploughs, and other utensils of his husbandry, for the wood. Two frank hearts are well met; David would buy, Araunah would give: the Jebusite would not sell, David will not take. Since it was for God, and to David, Araunah is loath to bargain; since it was for God, David wisheth to pay dear: "I will not offer burnt-offerings to the Lord my God, of that which doth cost me nothing." Heroical spirits do well become eminent persons. He, that knew it was better to give than to receive, would not receive, but give; there can be no devotion in a niggardly heart; as unto dainty palates, so to the godly soul, that tastes sweetest, that costs most: nothing is dear enough for the Creator of all things. It is a heartless piety of those base-minded Christians, that care only to serve God good-cheap.

BOOK XVII.

CONTEMPLATION I.—ADONIJAH DEFEATED.

DAVID had not so carefully husbanded his years as to maintain a vigorous age; he was therefore, what through wars, what with sorrows, what with sickness, decrepit betimes. By that time he was seventy years old, his natural heat was so wasted, that his clothes could not warm him; how many have we known of more strength, at more age! The holiest soul dwells not in an impregnable fort; if the revenging angel spared David, yet age and death will not spare him; neither his new altar, nor his costly sacrifice, can be of force against decay of nature; nothing but death can prevent the weaknesses of age.

None can blame a people, if when they have a good king, they are desirous to hold him. David's servants and subjects have commended unto his bed a fair young virgin; not for the heat of lust but of life, that by this means, they might make an outward supply of fuel for that vital fire which was well near extinguished with age.

As it is in the market, or the stage, so it is in our life; one goes out, another comes in: when David was withering, Adonijah was in his bosom; that son, as he was next to Absalom, both in the beauty of his body, and the time of his birth, so was he too like him in practice; he also taking advantage of his father's infirmity, will be carving himself of the kingdom of Israel; that he might no whit vary from his pattern, he gets him also chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. These two, Absalom and Adonijah, were the darlings of their father; their father had not displeased them from their childhood, therefore they both displeased him in his age; those children had need to be very gracious, that are not marred with pampering. It is more than God owes us, if we receive comfort in those children whom we have overloved; the indulgence of parents at last pays them home in crosses.

It is true that Adonijah was David's eldest son now remaining, and therefore might seem to challenge the justest title to the crown; but the kingdom of Israel, in so late an erection, had not yet known the right of succession. God himself, that had ordained the government, was as yet the immediate elector; he fetched Saul from amongst the stuff, and David from the sheepfold, and had now appointed Solomon from the ferule to the sceptre.

And if Adonijah, which is unlike, had not known this, yet it had been his part to have taken his father with him in this claim of his succession:

and not so to prevent a brother, that he should shoulder out a father, and, not so violently to preoccupate the throne, that he should rather be a rebel than an heir.

As Absalom, so Adonijah wants not furtherers in this usurpation, whether spiritual or temporal; Joab the general, and Abiathar the priest, give both counsel and aid to so unseasonable a challenge; these two had been firm to David in all his troubles, in all insurrections; yet now finding him fastened to the bed of age and death, they show themselves thus slippery in the loose. Outward happiness and friendship are not known till our last act. In the impotency of either our revenge or recompense, it will easily appear who loved us for ourselves, who for their own ends.

Had not Adonijah known that Solomon was designed to the kingdom, both by God and David, he had never invited all the rest of the king's sons, his brethren, and left out Solomon, who was otherwise the most unlikely to have been his rival in this honour; all the rest were elder than he, and might therefore have had more pretence for their competition. Doubtless the court of Israel could not but know, that, immediately upon the birth of Solomon, God sent him, by Nathan the prophet, a name and message of love; neither was it for nothing that God called him Jedidiah, and forepromised him the honour of building a house to his name; and in return of so glorious a service, the establishment of the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever; notwithstanding all which Adonijah, backed by the strength of a Joab, and the gravity of an Abiathar, will underwork Solomon, and justle into the not-yet-vacant seat of his father David. Vain men, while like proud, and yet brittle clay, they will be knocking their sides against the solid and eternal decree of God, break themselves in pieces.

I do not find that Adonijah sent any message of threats or unkindness to Zadok the priest, or Nathan the prophet, or Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the other worthies; only he invited them not to his feast with the king's sons and servants: sometimes a very omission is an affront and a menace. They well knew, that, since they were not called as guests, they were counted as enemies. Ceremonies of courtesy, though they be in themselves slight and arbitrary, yet the neglect of them, in some cases, may undergo a dangerous construction.

Nathan was the man by whom God had sent that errand of grace to David, concerning Solomon, assuring him both to reign and prosper; yet now, when Adonijah's plot was thus on foot, he doth not sit still, and depend upon the issue of God's decree, but he bestirs him in the business, and consults with Bathsheba, how at once to save their lives, and to advance Solomon, and defeat Adonijah. God's predetermination includes the means as well as the end; the same Providence that had ordained a crown to Solomon, a repulse to Adonijah, preservation to Bathsheba and Nathan, had fore-appointed the wise and industrious endeavours of the prophet to bring about his just and holy purposes. If we would not have God wanting to us, we must not be wanting to ourselves; even when we know what God hath meant to us, we may not be negligent.

The prophets of God did not look for revelation in all their affairs, in some things they were left to the counsel of their own hearts; the policy of Nathan was of use as well as his prophecy: that alone hath turned the stream into the right channel. Nothing could be more wisely contrived than the sending in of Bathsheba to David, with so seasonable and forcible an expostulation, and the seconding of hers with his own.

Though lust were dead in David, yet the respects of his old matrimonial love lived still; the very presence of Bathsheba pleaded strongly, but her speech more; the time was, when his affection offended in excess towards her, being then another's; he cannot now neglect her, being his own; and if either his age, or the remorse of his old offence should have set him off, yet she knew his oath was sure; "My lord, thou swarest by the Lord thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly, Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne;" his word had been firm, but his oath was inviolable; we are engaged if we have promised, but if we have sworn, we are bound.

Neither heaven nor earth have any gyves for that man that can shake off the fetters of an oath; for he cares not for that God whom he dares invoke to a falsehood; and he that cares not for God, will not care for man.

Ere Bathsheba can be over the threshold, Nathan, upon compact, is knocking at the door. God's prophet was never but welcome to the bed-chamber of king David; in a seeming strangeness he falls upon the same suit, upon the same complaint with Bathsheba: honest policies do not misbecome the holiest prophets; she might seem to speak as a woman, as a mother out of passion; the word of a prophet could not be misdoubted. He, therefore, that had formerly brought to David that chiding and bloody message concerning Bathsheba, comes now to David to sue for the life and honour of Bathsheba: and he that was sent from God to David to bring the news of a gracious promise of favour unto Solomon, comes now to challenge the execution of it from the hands of a father; and he, whose place freed him from suspicion of a faction, complains of the insolent demeanour and proclamation of Adonijah; what he began with an humble obeisance, shutting up in a lowly and loving expostulation, "Is this thing done by my lord the king, and thou hast not showed thy servant who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?" As Nathan was of God's council unto David, so was he of David's council both to God and the state. As God therefore, upon all occasions, told Nathan what he meant to do with David, so had David wont to tell Nathan what he meant to do in his holy and most important civil affairs. There are cases wherein it is not unfit for God's prophets to meddle with matters of state; it is no disparagement to religious princes to impart their counsels unto them who can requite them with the counsels of God.

That wood which a single iron could not rive, is soon splitted with a double wedge; the seasonable importunity of Bathsheba and Nathan, thus seconding each other, hath so wrought upon David, that now his love to Adonijah gives place to indignation, nature to a holy fidelity; and now he renews his ancient oath to Bathsheba with a passionate solemnity; "As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, even as I sware unto thee by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; so will I certainly do this day." In the decay of David's body, I find not his intellectual powers any whit impaired: as one therefore that from his bed could, with a perfect, if weak hand, steer the government of Israel, he gives wise and full directions for the inauguration of Solomon: Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the captain, receive his grave and princely charge for the carriage of that so weighty a business. They are commanded to take with them the royal guard, to set Solomon upon his father's mule, to carry him down in state to Gihon, to anoint him with the holy oil of the tabernacle, to sound the trumpets, and proclaim him in the streets, to bring him back with triumph and magnificence to the court, and set him in the royal throne, with all the due ceremonies of coronation.

How pleasing was this command to them, who, in Solomon's glory, saw their own safety! Benaiah applauds it, and not fearing a father's envy, in David's presence wishes Solomon's throne exalted above *his*; the people are ravished with the joy of so hopeful a succession, and break the earth, and fill the heaven with the noise of their music and shouting.

Solomon's guests had now at last better cheer than Adonijah's, whose feast, as all wicked men's, ended in horror; no sooner are their bellies full of meat, than their ears are full of the sound of those trumpets which at once proclaim Solomon's triumph, and their confusion; ever after the meal is ended comes the reckoning. God could as easily have prevented this jollity, as marred it; but he willingly suffers vain men to please themselves for a time in the conceited success of their own projects, that afterwards their disappointment may be so much the more grievous. No doubt, at this feast there was many a health drunken to Adonijah, many a confident boast of their prospering design, many a scorn of the despised faction of Solomon; and now, for their last dish, is served up astonishment, and fearful expectation of a just revenge. Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest, brings the news of Solomon's solemn and joyful enthronisation; now all hearts are cold, all faces pale, and every man hath but life enough to run away. How suddenly is this braving troop dispersed! Adonijah, their new prince, flies to the horns of the altar, as distrusting all hopes of life, save the sanctity of the place, and the mercy of his rival.

So doth the wise and just God befool proud and insolent sinners, in those secret plots wherein they hope to undermine the true Son of David, the Prince of peace; he suffers them to lay their heads together, and to feast themselves in a jocund security, and promise of success; at last, when they are at the height of their joys and hopes, he confounds all their devices, and lays them open to the scorn of the world, and to the anguish of their own guilty hearts.

CONTEMPLATION II.—DAVID'S END, AND SOLOMON'S BEGINNING.

It well became Solomon to begin his reign in peace. Adonijah receives pardon upon his good behaviour, and finds the throne of Solomon as safe as the altar. David lives to see a wise son warm in his seat; and now he, that yielded to succession, yields to nature. Many good counsels had David given his heir; now he sums them up in his end. Dying words are wont to be weightiest. The soul, when it is entering into glory, breathes nothing but divine. "I go the way of all the earth." How well is that princely heart content to subscribe to the conditions of human mortality! as one that knew sovereignty doth not reach to the affairs of nature. Though a king, he neither expects, nor desires an immunity from dissolution, making no account to go in any other than the common tract, to the universal home of mankind, the house of age. Whither should earth but to earth? and why should we grudge to do that which all do? "Be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man." Even when his spirit was going out, he puts spirit into his son. Age puts life into youth, and the dying animates the vigorous. He had well found, that strength was requisite to government, that he had need to be no less than a man that should rule over men. If greatness should never receive any opposition, yet those worlds of cares and businesses that attend the chair of state are able to overlay any mean powers. A weak man may obey, none but the strong can govern. Graceless courage were but the whetstone of tyranny. "Take heed therefore to the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes." The best legacy that David bequeaths to his heir, is the care of piety; himself had found the sweetness of a good conscience, and now he commends it to his successor. If there be any thing that, in our desires of the prosperous condition of our children, takes place of goodness, our hearts are not upright. Here was the father of a king, charging the king's son to keep the statutes of the King of kings; as one that knew greatness could neither exempt from obedience, nor privilege sin; as one that knew the least deviation in the greatest and highest orb, is both most sensible, and most dangerous. Neither would he have his son to look for any prosperity, save only from well-doing. That happiness is built upon sand or ice, which is raised upon any foundation besides virtue. If Solomon was wise, David was good; and if old Solomon had well remembered the counsel of old David, he had not so foully miscarried.

After the precepts of piety, follow those of justice, distributing in a due recompense, as revenge to Joab and Shimei, and favour to the house of Barzillai. The bloodiness of Joab had lain long upon David's heart: the hideous noise of those treacherous murders, as it had pierced heaven, so it still filled the ears of David: he could abhor the villany, though he could not revenge it; what he cannot pay, he will owe, and approve himself at last a faithful debitor: now he will defray it by the hand of Solomon. The slaughter was of Abner and Amasa: David appropriates it; "Thou knowest what Joab did to me." The sovereign is smitten in the subject; neither is it other than just, that the arraignment of mean malefactors runs in the style of wrong to the king's crown and dignity: how much more dost thou, O Son of David, take to thyself, those insolencies which are done to thy poorest subjects, servants, sons, members, here upon earth! No Saul can touch a Christian here below, but thou feelest it in heaven, and complainest.

But, what shall we think of this? David was a man of war, Solomon a king of peace; yet David refers this revenge to Solomon. How just it was that he who shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, should have his blood shed in peace, by a prince of peace! Peace is fittest to rectify the outrages of war: or whether is not this done in type of that divine administration, wherein thou, O Father of heaven, hast committed all judgment unto thine eternal Son? Thou, who couldst immediately either plague, or absolve sinners, wilt do neither, but by the hand of a Mediator.

Solomon learned betimes what his ripeness taught afterwards. "Take away the wicked from the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness." Cruel Joab and malicious Shimei must be therefore upon the first opportunity removed; the one lay open to present justice, for abetting the conspiracy of Adonijah, neither needs the help of time for a new advantage; the other went under the protection of an oath from David, and therefore must be fetched in upon a new challenge. The hoary head of both must be brought to the grave with blood, else David's head could not be brought to his grave in peace. Due punishment of malefactors is the debt of authority: if that holy king has run into arrearages, yet, as one that hates and fears to break the bank, he gives order to his paymaster, it shall be defrayed, if not by him, yet for him.

Generous natures cannot be unthankful. Barzillai had showed David some kindness in his extremity; and now the good man will have posterity to inherit the thanks. How much more bountiful is the Father of mercies, in the remuneration of our poor unworthy services! Even successions of generations shall fare the better for one good parent.

The dying words and thoughts of the man after God's own heart did not confine themselves to the straits of these particular charges, but enlarged themselves to the care of God's public service. As good men are best at last, David did never so busily and carefully marshal the affairs of God, as when he was fixed to the bed of his age and death. Then did he load his son Solomon with the charge of building the house of God; then did he lay before the eyes of his son the model and pattern of that whole sacred work, whereof if Solomon bear the name, yet David no less merits it. He now gives the platform of the courts and buildings: he gives the gold and silver for that holy use, a hundred thousand talents of gold, a thousand thousand talents of silver, besides brass and iron passing weight: he weighs out those precious metals for their several designments; every future vessel is laid out already in his poise, if not in his form. He excites the princes of Israel to their assistance, in so high a work: he takes notice of their bountiful offerings: he numbers up the Levites for the public service, and sets them their tasks. He appoints the singers, and other musicians to their stations; the porters to the gates that should be; and now, when he hath set all things in a desired order and forwardness, he shuts up with a zealous blessing of his Solomon, and his people, and sleeps with his fathers. O blessed soul, how quiet a possession hast thou now taken, after so many tumults, of a better crown! Thou that hast prepared all things for the house of thy God, how happily art thou now welcomed to that house of his, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! Who now shall envy unto good princes the honour of overseeing the businesses of God and his church, when David was thus punctual in these divine provisions? What fear can be of usurpation, where they have so glorious a precedent?

Now is Solomon the second time crowned king of Israel, and now in his own right, as formerly in his father's, sits peaceably upon the throne of the Lord: his awe and power come on faster than his years. Envy and ambition, where it is once kindled, may sooner be hid in the ashes than quite put out. Adonijah yet hangs after his old hopes, he remembers how sweet he found the name of a king; and now hath laid a new plot for the setting up of his cracked title: he would make the bed a step to the throne; his old complices are sure enough; his part would gather much strength, if he might enjoy Abishag, the relict of his father, to wife. If it were not the Jewish fashion, as is pretended, that a king's widow should marry none but a king; yet certainly the power both of the alliance and friendship of a queen, must needs not a little advance his purpose. The crafty rival dare not either move the suit to Solomon, or effect the marriage without him; but would cunningly undermine the son by the suit of that mother, whose suit had undermined him. The weaker vessels are commonly used in the most dangerous suggestions of evil.

Bathsheba was so wise a woman, that some of her counsels are canonized for divine: yet she saw not the depth of this drift of Adonijah; therefore she both entertains the suit, and moves it. But whatever were the intent of the suitor, could she choose but see the unlawfulness of so incestuous a match? It is not long since she saw her late husband David abominating the bed of those his concubines that had been touched by his son Absalom; and can she hold it lawful, that his son Adonijah should climb up to the bed of his father's wife? Sometimes even the best eyes are dim, and discern not those things which are obvious to weaker sights: or whether did not Bathsheba well see the foulness of the suit; and yet in compassion of Adonijah's late repulse, wherein she was the chief agent, and, in a desire to make him amends for the loss of the kingdom, she yields even thus to gratify him. It is an injurious weakness to be drawn upon any by respects, to the furtherance of faulty suits of unlawful actions.

No sooner doth Bathsheba come in place, than Solomon her son rises from his chair of state, and meets her, and bows to her, and sets her on his right hand, as not so remembering himself to be a king, that he should forget he was a son. No outward dignity can take away the rights and obligations of nature. Had Bathsheba been as mean as Solomon was mighty, she had carried away this honour from a gracious son: yet for all these due compliments, Bathsheba goes away with a denial: reverence she shall have, she shall not have a condescent.

In the acts of magistracy, all regards of natural relations must give way. That which she propounded as a small request, is now, after a general and confused engagement, rejected as unreasonable. It were pity we should be heard in all our suits. Bathsheba makes a petition against herself, and knows it not; her safety and life depends upon Solomon's reign, yet she unwittingly moves for the advancement of Adonijah.

Solomon was too dutiful to check his mother, and too wise to yield to her. In unfit supplications, we are most heard when we are repelled. Thus doth our God many times answer our prayers with merciful denials; and most blesseth us in crossing our desires.

Wise Solomon doth not find himself perplexed with the scruple of his promise; he that had said, "Ask on, for I will not say thee nay," can now swear, "God do so to me, and more also, If Adonijah hath not spoken this word against his own life." His promise was according to his supposition; his supposition was of no other than of a suit, honest, reasonable, expedient; now he holds himself free from that grant, wherein there was at once both sin and danger. No man can be intangled with general words against his own just and honest intentions.

The policies of wicked men befool them at last: this intercession hath undone Adonijah, and, instead of the throne, hastens his grave. The sword of Benaiah puts an end to that dangerous rivalry. Joab and Abiathar still held champerty with Adonijah; their hand was both in the claim of his kingdom, and in the suit of Abishag. There are crimes wherein there are no accessories; such is this of treason. Abiathar may thank his burden that he lives: had he not born the ark of the Lord before David, he had not now carried his head upon his shoulders; had he not been afflicted with David, he had not perished with Adonijah: now though he were, in his own merit, a man of death, yet he shall survive his partners,—"Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields." The priesthood of Abiathar, as it aggravated his crime, so it shall preserve his life. Such honour have good princes given to the ministers of the sanctuary, that their very coat hath been defence enough against the sword of justice; how much more should it be of proof against the contempt of base persons!

Besides his function, respect is had to his sufferings: the father and brethren of Abiathar were slain for David's sake, therefore for David's sake Abiathar, though worthy of death, shall live: he had been now a dead man, if he had not been formerly afflicted. Thus doth our good God deal with us; by the rod he prevents the sword, and therefore will not condemn us for our sins, because we have suffered. If Abiathar do not forfeit his life, yet his office he shall; he must change Jerusalem for Anathoth, and the priesthood for a retired privacy. It was fourscore years ago since the sentence of judgment was denounced against the house of Eli; now doth it come to execution. This just quarrel against Abiathar, the last of that line shall make good the threatened judgment. The wickedness of Eli's house was neither purged by sacrifice, nor obliterated by time. If God pay slowly, yet he pays sure. Delay of most certain punishment, is neither any hinderance to his justice, nor any comfort to our miseries.

CONTEMPLATION III.—THE EXECUTION OF JOAB AND SHIMEI.

ABIATHAR shall live, though he serve not. It is in the power of princes to remit, at least, these punishments which attend the breach of human laws: good reason they should have power to dispense with the wrongs done to their own persons. The news of Adonijah's death, and Abiathar's removal, cannot but affright Joab, who now runs to Gibeon, and takes sanctuary in the tabernacle of God; all his hope of defence is in the horns of the altar. Fond Joab, hadst thou formerly sought for counsel from the tabernacle, thou hadst not now needed to seek to it for refuge; if thy devotions had not been wanting to that altar, thou hadst not needed it for a shelter. It is the fashion of our foolish presumption to look for protection where we have not cared to yield obedience.

Even a Joab clings fast to God's altar in his extremity, which in his prosperity he regarded not. The worst men would be glad to make use of God's ordinances for their advantage. Necessity will drive the most profane and lawless man to God: but what do these bloody hands touching the holy altar of God? Miserable Joab, what help canst thou expect from that sacred pile? Those horns, that were besprinkled with the blood of beasts, abhor to be touched by the blood of men; that altar was for the expiation of sin by blood, not for the protection of the sin of blood. If Adonijah fled thither and escaped, it is murder that pursues thee more than conspiracy. God hath no sanctuary for a wilful homicide.

Yet such respect doth Benaiah give to that holy place, that his sword is unwilling to touch him that touches the altar. Those horns shall put off death for the time, and give protraction of the execution, though not preservation of life. How sweet is life, even to those who have been prodigal of the blood of others, that Joab shifts thus to hold it but some few hours! Benaiah returns with Joab's answer, instead of his head, "Nay, but I will die here:" as not daring to unsheath his sword against a man sheltered in God's tabernacle, without a new commission. Young Solomon is so well acquainted with the law of God, in such a case, that he sticks not at the sentence: he knew that God had enacted, "If a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die." He knew Joab's murders had not been more presumptuous than guileful; and therefore he sends Benaiah to take away the offender both from God and men, from the altar and the world.

No subject had merited more than Joab. When proclamation was made in Israel, that whoever should smite the Jebusites first, he should be the chief and captain, Joab was the man: when David built some part of Jerusalem, Joab built the rest; so that Jerusalem owes itself to Joab, both for recovery and reparation. No man held so close to David; no man was more intent to the weal of Israel; none so successful in victories; yet now is he called to reckon for his old sins, and must repay blood to Amasa and Abner. It is not in the power of all our deserts to buy off one sin, either with God or man: where life is so deeply forfeited, it admits of no redemption.

The honest simplicity of those times knew not of any infamy in the execution of justice. Benaiah, who was the great marshal under Solomon, thinks not his fingers defiled with that fatal stroke. It is a foolish niceness to put more shame in the doing of justice, than in the violating of it.

In one act Solomon hath approved himself both a good magistrate and a good son, fulfilling at once the will of a father and the charge of God; concluding upon this just execution, that, "Upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, there shall be peace for ever from the Lord;" and inferring, that without this there could have been no peace.

Blood is a restless suitor, and will not leave clamouring for judgment, till the mouth be stopped with revenge. In this case favour to the offender is cruelty to the favourer.

Now hath Joab paid all his arrearages by the sword of Benaiah; there is no suit against his corpse, that hath the honour of a burial fit for a peer of Israel, for the near cousin to the king. Death puts an end to all quarrels: Solomon strikes off the score when God is satisfied; the revenge that survives death, and will not be shut up in the coffin, is barbarous, and unbeseeming true Israelites.

Only Shimei remains upon the file; his course is next, yet so, as that it shall be in his own liberty to hasten his end. Upon David's remission, Shimei dwells securely in Bahurim, a town of the tribe of *Benjamin*; doubtless, when he saw so round justice done upon Adonijah and Joab, his guilty heart could not think Solomon's message portended ought but his execution; and now he cannot but be well pleased with so easy conditions of dwelling at Jerusalem, and not passing over the brook Kidron; what more delightful place could he choose to live in than that city, which was the glory of the whole earth? What more pleasant bounds could he wish than the sweet banks of Kidron? Jerusalem could be no prison to him, while it was a paradise to his betters; and, if he had a desire to take fresh air, he had the space of six furlongs to walk from the city to the brook; he could not complain to be so delectably confined; and besides, thrice every year, he might be sure to see all his friends, without stirring his foot.

Wise Solomon, while he cared to seem not too severe an exactor of that which his father had remitted, prudently lays insensible twigs for so foul an offender; besides the old grudge, no doubt, Solomon saw cause to suspect the fidelity of Shimei, as a man who was ever known to be hollow to the house of David; the obscurity of a country life would easily afford him more safe opportunities of secret mischief; many eyes shall watch him in the city, he cannot look out unseen, he cannot whisper unheard; upon no other terms shall he enjoy his life, which the least straying shall forfeit.

Shimei feels no pain in this restraint; how many nobles of Israel do that for pleasure, which he doth upon command? Three years hath he lived within compass, limited both by Solomon's charge and his own oath; it was still in his power, notwithstanding David's caveat, to have laid down his hoary head in the grave, without blood: the just God infatuates those whom he means to plague. Two of Shimei's servants are fled to Gath; and now he saddles his ass, and is gone to fetch them back: either he thinks this word of Solomon is forgotten, or in the multitude of greater affairs, not heeded, or this so small an occurrence will not come to his ears. Covetousness, and presumption of impunity, are the destruction of many a soul; Shimei seeks his servants, and loses himself. How many are there who cry out of this folly, and yet imitate it! These earthly things either are our servants, or should be; how commonly do we see men run out of the bounds, set by God's law, to hunt after them, till their souls incur a fearful judgment!

Princes have thousands of eyes and ears: if Shimei will for more secrecy saddle his own ass, and take, as is like, the benefit of night for his passage, his journey cannot be hid from Solomon. How wary had those men need to be which are obnoxious! Without delay is Shimei complained of, convented, charged with violation both of the oath of God, and the injunction of Solomon; and that all these might appear to be but n occasion of that punishment, whose cause was more remote; now is all that old venom laid before him, which his malice had long since spit at God's anointed. "Thou knowest all the wickedness whereto thine heart is privy, that thou didst to David my father."

Had this old tally been stricken off, yet could not Shimei have pleaded ought for his life; for had he said, Let not my lord the king be thus mortally displeased for so small an offence; who ever died for passing over Kidron? what man is the worse for my harmless journey?—it had soon been returned, If the act be small, yet the circumstances are deadly; the commands of sovereign authority make the slightest duties weighty; if the journey be harmless, yet not the disobedience; it is not for subjects to poise the prince's charge in the scales of their weak constructions, but they must suppose it ever to be of such importance as is pretended by the commander. Besides, the precept here was a mutual adjuration: Shimei swore not to go; Solomon swore his death if he went; the one oath must be revenged, the other must be kept: if Shimei were false in offending, Solomon will be just in punishing. Now therefore, that which Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, wished to have done in the greenness of the wound, and was repelled; after long festering, Benaiah is commanded to do. The stones that Shimei threw at David, struck not so deep as Benaiah's sword; the tongue that cursed the Lord's anointed hath paid the head to boot. Vengeance against rebels may sleep, it cannot die; a sure though late judgment attends those that dare lift up either their hand or tongue against the sacred persons of God's vicegerents. How much less will the God of heaven suffer unrevenged the insolencies and blasphemies against his own divine Majesty! It is a fearful word, He should not be just, if he should hold these guiltless.

CONTEMPLATION IV.—SOLOMON'S CHOICE, WITH HIS JUDGMENT UPON THE TWO HARLOTS.

AFTER so many messages and proofs of grace, Solomon begins doubtfully, both for his match, and for his devotion. If Pharaoh's daughter were not a proselyte, his early choice was besides unwarrantable, dangerous. The high places not only stood, but were frequented, both by the people and king. I do not find David climbing up those mishallowed hills, in an affection of the variety of altars: Solomon doth so, and yet loves the Lord, and is loved of God again. Such is the mercy of our God, that he will not suffer our well-meant weaknesses to bereave us of his favours: he rather pities than plagues us for the infirmities of upright hearts.

Gibeon was well worthy to be the chief, yea, the only high place; there was the allowed altar of God, there was the tabernacle, though, as then, severed from the ark; thither did young Solomon go up; and, as desiring to begin his reign with God, there he offers no less than a thousand sacrifices.

Solomon worships God by day; God appears to Solomon by night. Well may we look to enjoy God, when we have served him; the night cannot but be happy, whose day hath been holy.

It was no unusual course with God, to reveal himself unto his servants by dreams; so did he here to Solomon, who saw more with his eyes shut, than ever they could see open, even him that was invisible. The good king offereth unto God a thousand burnt-sacrifices, and now God had offered him his option, "Ask what I shall give thee." He, whose the beasts are on a thousand mountains, graciously accepts a small return of his own. It stands not with the munificence of a bountiful God to be indebted to his creature; we cannot give him ought unrecompensed; there is no way wherein we can be so liberal to ourselves, as by giving to the Possessor of all things. And art thou still, O God, *less* free unto us thy meaner servants, under the gospel? Hast thou not said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, it shall be given you?" Only give us grace not to be wanting unto thee, and we know thou canst not suffer any thing to be wanting unto us.

The night follows the temper of the day; and the heart so useth to sleep as it wakes. Had not the thoughts of Solomon been intent upon wisdom by day, he had not made it his suit in his dream: there needs no leisure of deliberation; the heart was so forestalled with the love and admiration of wisdom, that, not abiding the least motion of a competition, it fastens on that grace it had longed for; "Give unto thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people." Had not Solomon been wise before, he had not known the worth of wisdom, he had not preferred it in his desires. The dunghill cocks of the world cannot know the price ✓ of this pearl; those that have it, know that all other excellencies are but trash and rubbish unto it. Solomon was a great king, and saw that he had power enough; but withal, he found that royalty, without wisdom, was no other than eminent dishonour: there is no trade of life whereto there belongs not a peculiar wisdom, without which there is nothing but a tedious unprofitableness; much more to the highest and busiest vocation, the regiment of men. As God hath no reason to give his best favours unasked, so hath he no will to withhold them where they are asked.

He, that in his cradle had the title of "Beloved of God," is now beloved more in the throne for the love and desire of wisdom; this soil could never have borne this fruit alone; Solomon could not so much as have dreamed of wisdom, if God had not put it into him: and now God takes the suit so well, as if he were beholden to his creature for wishing the best to itself; and because Solomon hath asked what he should, he shall now receive both what he asked, and what he asked not; riches and honour shall be given him into the match. So doth God love a good choice, that he recompenses it with overgiving. "Could we but first seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all these earthly things should be superadded to us." Had Solomon made wealth his boon, he had failed both of riches and wisdom; now he asks the best, and speeds of all. They are in a fair way of happiness that can pray well. It was no discomfort to Solomon, that he awaked, and found it a dream; for he knew this dream was divine and oracular; and he already found, in his first waking, the real performance of what was promised him sleeping: such illumination did he sensibly find in all the rooms of his heart, as if God had now given him a new soul. No marvel if Solomon, now returning from the tabernacle to the ark, testified his joy and thankfulness by burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings, and public feastings; the heart that hath found in itself the lively testimonies of God's presence and favour cannot contain itself from outward expressions.

God likes not to have his gifts lie dead where he hath conferred them; Israel shall soon witness, that they have a king enlightened from heaven, in whom wisdom did not stay for heirs, did not admit of any parallel in his predecessors; the all-wise God will find occasions to draw forth those graces to use and light which he hath bestowed on man. Two harlots come before young Solomon with a difficult plea; it is not like the prince's ear was the first that heard this complaint; there was a subordinate course of justice, for the determination of these meaner incidences: the hardness of this decision brought the matter, through all the benches of inferior judicature, to the tribunal of Solomon. The very Israelitish harlots were not so unnatural, as some now a-days that counterfeit honesty; these strive for the fruit of their womb, ours to put them off; one son is yet alive, two mothers contend for him. The children were alike for features, for age; the mothers were alike for reputation; here can be no evidence from others' eyes, whether's now is the living child, and whether's is the dead. Had Solomon gone about to wring forth the truth by tortures, he had perhaps plagued the innocent, and added pain to the misery of her loss; the weaker had been guilty, and the more able to bear had carried away both the child and the victory. The countenance of either of the mothers bewrayed an equality of passion; sorrow possessed the one for the son she had lost, and the other for the son she was in danger to lose: both were equally peremptory, and importunate in their claim. It is in vain to think that the true part can be discerned by the vehemence of their challenge; falsehood is ofttimes more clamorous than truth; no witnesses can be produced; they two dwelt apart under one roof; and if some neighbours have seen the children at their birth, and circumcision, yet how little difference, how much change is there in the favour of infants! How doth death alter more confirmed lines!

The impossibility of proof makes the guilty more confident, more impudent; the true mother pleads that her child was taken away at midnight by the other; but in her sleep, she saw it not, she felt it not; and if all her senses could have witnessed it, yet here was but the affirmation of the one, against the denial of the other, which in persons alike credible, do but counterpoise. What is there now to lead the judge, since there is nothing either in the act, or circumstances, or persons, or plea, or evidence, that might sway the sentence? Solomon well saw, that, when all outward proofs failed, there was an inward affection, which, if it could be fetched out, would certainly bewray the true mother; he knew sorrow might more easily be dissembled than natural love: both sorrowed for their own; both could love one as theirs. To draw forth then this true proof of motherhood, Solomon calls for a sword. Doubtless, some of the wiser hearers smiled upon each other, and thought in themselves, What, will the young king cut these knotty causes in pieces! will he divide justice with edge-tools? will he smite at hazard, before conviction? The actions of wise princes are riddles to vulgar constructions; neither is it for the shallow capacities of the multitude to fathom the deep projects of sovereign authority: that sword which had served for execution, shall now serve for trial: "Divide ye the living child in twain, and give the one half to the one, and the other half to the other!" Oh divine oracle of justice, commanding that which it would not have done, that it might find out that which could not be discovered; neither God nor his deputies may be so taken at their words, as if they always intended their commands for action, and not sometimes for probation.

This sword hath already pierced the breast of the true mother, and divided her heart with fear and grief, at so killing a sentence; there needs no other rack to discover nature; and now she thinks, Woe is me that came for justice, and am answered with cruelty! "Divide ye the living child!" Alas! what hath that poor infant offended, that it survives and is sued for? How much less miserable had I been, that my child had been smothered in my sleep, than mangled before mine eyes! If a dead carcass could have satisfied me, I needed not to have complained; what a woeful condition am I fallen into, who am accused to have been the death of my supposed child already, and now shall be the death of my own! If there were no loss of my child, yet how can I endure this torment of mine own bowels! how can I live to see this part of myself sprawling under that bloody sword! And while she thinks thus, she sues to that suspected mercy of her just judge. "Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and slay him not:" as thinking, if he live, he shall but change a mother; if he die, his mother loseth a son: while he lives, it shall be my comfort that I have a son, though I may not call him so; dying, he perisheth to both; it is better he should live to a wrong mother, than to neither. Contrarily her envious competitor, as holding herself well satisfied that her neighbour should be as childless as herself, can say, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it." Well might Solomon, and every hearer, conclude, that either she was no mother, or a monster, that could be content with the murder of her child, and that if she could have been the true mother, and yet have desired the blood of her infant, she had been as worthy to have been stripped of her child for so foul unnaturalness, as the other had been worthy to enjoy him for her honest compassion. Not more justly than wisely therefore doth Solomon trace the true mother by the footsteps of love and pity; and adjudgeth the child to those bowels that had yearned at his danger.

Even in morality it is thus also: truth as it is one, so it loves entireness; falsehood, division. Satan, that hath no right to the heart, would be content with a piece of it; God, that made it all, will have either the whole or none. The erroneous church strives with the true, for the living child of saving doctrine; each claims it for her own; heresy, conscious of her own injustice, would be content to go away with a leg, or an arm of sound principles, as hoping to make up the rest with her own mixtures: truth cannot abide to part with a joint, and will rather endure to lose all by violence, than a piece through a willing connivancy.

CONTEMPLATION V.—THE TEMPLE.

It is a weak and injurious censure that taxeth Solomon's slackness in founding the house of God; great bodies must have but slow motions: he was wise that said, The matters must all be prepared without, ere we build within; and if David have laid ready a great part of the metals and timber, yet many a tree must be felled and squared, and many a stone hewn and polished, ere this foundation could be laid: neither could those large cedars be cut, sawn, seasoned in one year; four years are soon gone in so vast a preparation. David had not been so entire a friend to Hiram, if Hiram had not been a friend to God; Solomon's wisdom had taught him to make use of so good a neighbour, of a father's friend: he knew that the Tyrians' skill was not given them for nothing; not Jews only, but Gentiles must have their hand in building the temple of God; only Jews meddled with the tabernacle, but the temple is not built without the aid of Gentiles; they, together with us, make up the church of God.

Even Pagans have their arts from heaven; how justly may we improve their graces to the service of the God of heaven! If there be a Tyrian that can work more curiously in gold, in silver, in brass, in iron, in purple, and blue silk, than an Israelite, why should not he be employed about the temple? Their heathenism is their own, their skill is their Maker's: many a one works for the church of God, that yet hath no part in it.

Solomon raises a tribute for the work, not of money, but of men: thirty thousand Israelites are levied for the service: yet not continuedly, but with intermission, their labour is more generous, and less pressing: it is enough if they keep their courses one month in Lebanon, two at home; so as ever ten thousand work, while twenty thousand breathe. So favourable is God to his creature, that he requires us not to be overtoiled in the works of his own service. Due respirations are requisite in the holiest acts. The main stress of the work lies upon proselytes: whose both number and pains was herein more than the natives: a hundred and fifty thousand of them are employed in bearing burdens, in hewing stones; besides their three thousand three hundred overseers. Now were the despised Gibeonites of good use, and in vain doth Israel wish that the zeal of Saul had not robbed them of so serviceable drudges.

There is no man so mean but may be some way useful to the house of God. Those that cannot work in gold, and silver, and silk, yet may cut and hew; and those that can do neither, yet may carry burdens. Even the services that are more homely, are not less necessary. Who can dishearten himself in the conscience of his own insufficency, when he sees God can as well serve himself of his labour, as of his skill?

The temple is framed in Lebanon, and set upon Sion; neither hammer nor axe was heard in that holy structure; there was nothing but noise in Lebanon, nothing in Sion but silence and peace. Whatever tumults are abroad, it is fit there should be all quietness and sweet concord in the church. O God, that the axes of schism, or the hammers of furious contentions, should be heard within thy sanctuary! Thine house is not built with blows, with blows it is beaten down. Oh knit the hearts of thy servants together in the unity of the spirit, and the bond of peace, that we may mind and speak the same things; that thou, who art the God of peace, mayest take pleasure to dwell under the quiet roof of our hearts!

Now is the foundation laid, and the walls rising of that glorious fabric, which all nations admired, and all times have celebrated; even those stones which were laid in the base of the building were not ragged and rude, but hewn and costly; the part that lies covered with earth from the eyes of all beholders, is no less precious, than those that are more conspicuous. God is not all for the eye; he pleaseth himself with the hidden value of the living stones of his spiritual temple. How many noble graces of his servants have been buried by obscurity; not discerned so much as by their own eyes! which yet as he gave, he crowneth. Hypocrites regard nothing but show; God nothing but truth.

The matter of so goodly a frame strives with the proportion, whether shall more excel: here was nothing but white marble without, nothing but cedar and gold within. Upon the hill of Sion stands that glittering and snowy pile, which both inviteth and dazzleth the eyes of passengers afar off; so much more precious within, as cedar is better than stone, gold than cedar. No base thing goes to the making up of God's house. If Satan may have a dwelling, he cares not though he patch it up of the rubbish of stone, or rotten sticks, or dross of metals; God will admit of nothing that is not pure and exquisite; his church consists of none but the faithful, his habitation is in no heart but the gracious.

The fashion was no other than that of the tabernacle; only this was more costly, more large, more fixed; God was the same that dwelt in both; he varied not; the same mystery was in both; only it was fit there should be a proportion betwixt the work and the builder. The tabernacle was erected in a popular estate, the temple in a monarchy; it was fit this should savour of the munificence of a king, as that of the zeal of a multitude: that was erected in the flitting condition of Israel in the desert; this, in their settled residence in the promised land: it was fit therefore that should be framed for motion, this for rest. Both of them were distinguished into three remarkable divisions, whereof each was more noble, more reserved than other.

But what do we bend our eyes upon,—stone, wood, and metals? God would never have taken pleasure in these dead materials for their own sakes, if they had not had a further intendment. Methinks I see four temples in this one. It is but one in matter, as the God that dwells in it is but one; three yet more in resemblance, according to the division of them in whom it pleases God to inhabit; for wherever God dwells, there is his temple. O God, thou vouchsafest to dwell in the believing heart. As we thy silly creatures have our being in thee, so thou, the Creator of heaven and earth, hast thy dwelling in us. The heaven of heavens is not able to contain thee, and yet thou disdainest not to dwell in the strait lodgings of our renewed souls. So then, because God's children are many, and those many divided in respect of themselves, though united in their head, therefore this temple, which is but one in collection, as God is one, is manifold in the distribution, as the saints are many; each man bearing about him a little shrine of this Infinite Majesty: and for that the most general division of the saints is in their place and estate, some struggling and toiling in this earthly warfare, others triumphing in heavenly glory; therefore hath God two other, more universal temples; one the church of his saints on earth; the other, the highest heaven of his saints glorified. In all these, O God, thou dwellest for ever: and this material house of thine is a clear representation of these three spiritual: else what were a temple made with hands unto the God of spirits? And though one of these was a true type of all, yet how are they all exceeded each by other? This of stone, though most rich and costly; yet what is it to the living temple of the Holy Ghost, which is our body? What is the temple of this body of ours to the temple of Christ's body, which is his church? And what is the temple of God's church on earth, to that which triumpheth gloriously in heaven?

How easily do we see all these in this one visible temple; which, as it had three distinctions of rooms, the porch, the holy place, the holy of holies, so is each of them answered spiritually: In the porch we find the regenerate soul entering into the blessed society of the church; in the holy place the communion of the true visible church on earth, selected from the world; in the holy of holies, whereinto the high priest entered once a-year, the glorious heaven, into which our true High Priest, Christ Jesus, entered once for all, to make an atonement betwixt God and man. In all these, what a meet correspondence there is in proportion, matter, situation!

In proportion; the same rule that skilful carvers observe in the cutting out of the perfect statue of a man, that the height be thrice the breadth, and the breadth one third of the height, was likewise duly observed in the fabric of the temple, whose length was double to the height, and treble to the breadth, as being sixty cubits long, thirty high, and twenty broad. How exquisite a symmetry hast thou ordained, O God, betwixt the faithful heart, and thy church on earth, with that in heaven! how accurate in each of these, in all their powers and parts, compared with other! So hath God ordered the believing soul, that it hath neither too much shortness of grace, nor too much height of conceit, nor too much breadth of passion: so hath he ordered his visible church, that there is a necessary inequality, without any disproportion; a height of government, a length of extent, a breadth of jurisdiction duly answerable to each other: so hath he ordered his triumphant church above, that it hath a length of eternity, answered with a height of perfection, and a breadth of incomprehensible glory.

In matter, all was here of the best: the wood was precious, sweet, lasting; the stones, beautiful, costly, insensible of age; the gold, pure and glittering; so are the graces of God's children, excellent in their nature, dear in their acceptation, eternal in their use; so are the ordinances of God in his church, holy, comfortable, irrefragable; so is the perfection of his glorified saints, incomparable, unconceivable.

In situation; the outer parts were here more common, the inner more holy and peculiarly reserved. I find one court of the temple open to the unclean, to the uncircumcised; within that, another open only to the Israelites, and of them, to the clean; within that, yet another, proper only to the priests and Levites, where was the brazen altar for sacrifice, and the brazen sea for washing; the eyes of the laity might follow their oblations in hither, their feet might not.

Yet more, in the covered rooms of the temple, there is, whither the priests only may enter, not the Levites; there is, whither the high priest only may enter, not his brethren.

It is thus in every renewed man, the individual temple of God; the outward parts are allowed common to God and the world; the inwardest and secretest, which is the heart, is reserved only for the God that made it. It is thus in the church visible; the false and foul-hearted hypocrite hath access to the holy ordinances of God, and treads in his courts; only the true Christian hath entire and private conversation with the Holy One of Israel; he only is admitted into the holy of holies, and enters within the glorious vail of heaven.

If from the walls we look into the furniture; what is the altar, whereon our sacrifices of prayer and praises are offered to the Almighty, but a contrite heart? What the golden candlesticks, but the illumined understanding, wherein the light of the knowledge of God, and his divine will, shineth for ever? What the tables of shew-bread, but the sanctified memory, which keepeth the bread of life continually? Yea, if we shall presume so far as to enter into the very closet of God's oracle; even there, O God, do we find our unworthy hearts so honoured by thee, that they are made thy very ark, wherein thy royal law, and the pot of thy heavenly manna, is kept for ever; and from whose Propitiatory, shaded with the wings of thy glorious angels, thou givest thy gracious testimonies of thy good Spirit, witnessing with ours, that we are the children of the living God.

Behold, if Solomon built a temple unto thee, thou hast built a temple unto thyself in us; we are not only, through thy grace, living stones in thy temple, but living temples in thy Sion. O do thou ever dwell in this thine house, and in this thy house let us ever serve thee! Wherefore else hast thou a temple, but for thy presence with us, and for our worshipping of thee? The time was, when, as thy people, so thyself didst lodge in flitting tents, ever shifting, ever moving; thence thou thoughtest best to sojourn both in Shiloh, and the roof of Obed-Edom; after that, thou condescendedst to settle thine abode with men, and wouldst dwell in a house of thine own at thy Jerusalem. So didst thou in the beginning lodge with our first parents in a tent, sojourn with Israel under the law, and now makest a constant residence, under the gospel, in the hearts of thy chosen children, from whence thou wilt remove no more; they shall remove from the world, from themselves; thou shalt not remove from them.

Wheresoever thou art, O God, thou art worthy of adoration; since thou ever wilt dwell in us, be thou ever worshipped in us. Let the altars of our clean hearts send up ever to thee the sweetest perfumed smokes of our holy meditations and faithful prayers, and cheerful thanksgivings. Let the pure lights of our faith and godly conversation, shine ever before thee and men, and never be put out. Let the bread of life stand ever ready upon the pure and precious tables of our hearts. Lock up thy law and thy manna within us, and speak comfortably to us from thy mercy-seat. Suffer nothing to enter in hither that is unclean; sanctify us unto thyself, and be thou sanctified in us.

CONTEMPLATION VI.—SOLOMON AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

God hath no use of the dark lanterns of secret and reserved perfections; we ourselves do not light up candles to put them under bushels. The great lights, whether of heaven or earth, are not intended to obscurity; but as to give light unto others, so to be seen themselves. Dan and Beersheba were too strait bounds for the fame of Solomon, which now hath flown over all lands and seas, and raised the world to an admiration of his more than human wisdom. Even so, O thou everlasting King of peace, thy name is great among the Gentiles: there is no speech nor language, where the report of thee is not heard; "The sound of thee is gone forth through all the earth; thy name is an ointment poured out, therefore the virgins love thee."

No doubt many, from all coasts, came to learn and wonder, none with so much note as this noble daughter of Cham, who herself deserves the next wonder to him whom she came to hear and admire; that a woman, a princess, a rich and great queen, should travel from the remotest South, from Sheba, a region famous for the greatest delicacies of nature, to learn wisdom, is a matchless example. We know merchants that venture to either Indies for wealth; others we know daily to cross the seas for wanton curiosity. Some few philosophers we have known to have gone far for learning; and, amongst princes, it is no unusual thing to send their ambassadors to far distant kingdoms, for transaction of businesses either of state or commerce: but that a royal lady should in person undertake and overcome so tedious a journey, only to observe and inquire into the mysteries of nature, art, religion, is a thing past both parallel and limitation. Why do we think any labour great, or any way long, to hear a greater than Solomon? How justly shall the queen of the South rise up in judgment, and condemn us, who may hear wisdom crying in our streets, and neglect her!

Certainly so wealthy a queen, and so great a lover of wisdom, could not want great scholars at home; them she had first opposed with her enigmatical demands; and now, finding herself unsatisfied, she betakes herself to this oracle of God. It is a good thing to doubt, better to be resolved: the mind that never doubts shall learn nothing; the mind that ever doubts shall never profit by learning. Our doubts only serve to stir us up to seek truth: our resolutions settle us in the truth we have found. There were no pleasure in resolutions, if we had not been formerly troubled with doubts; there were nothing but discomfort and disquietness in doubts, if it were not for the hope of resolution: it is not safe to suffer doubts to dwell too long upon the heart: there may be good use of them as passengers, dangerous as inmates: happy are we, if we can find a Solomon to remove them.

Fame, as it is always a blab, so ofttimes a liar. The wise princess found cause to distrust so uncertain an informer, whose reports are still either doubtful or fabulous; and, like winds or streams, increase in passing. If very great things were not spoken of Solomon, fame should have wronged him; and, if but just rumours were spread of his wisdom, there needed much credulity to believe them. This great queen would not suffer herself to be led by the ears, but comes in person to examine the truth of foreign relations. How much more unsafe is it, in the most important businesses of our souls, to trust the opinions and reports of others! Those ears and eyes are ill bestowed, that do not serve to choose and judge for their owners.

When we come to a rich treasure, we need not be bidden to carry away what we are able. This wise lady, as she came far for knowledge, so, finding the plenty of this vein, she would not depart without her full load; there was nothing wherein she would leave herself unsatisfied. She knew that she could not every day meet with a Solomon; and therefore she makes her best use of so learned a master: now she empties her heart of all her doubts, and fills it with instruction. It is not good neglecting the opportunities of furnishing our souls with profitable, with saving knowledge. There is much wisdom in moving a question well, though there be more in affoiling it: what use do we make of Solomon's teacher, if, sitting at the feet of Christ, we leave our hearts either ignorant or perplexed!

As if the errand of this wealthy queen had been to buy wisdom, she came with her camels laden with gold, and precious stones, and rich odours: though to a mighty king, she will not come to school empty-handed: if she came to fetch an invaluable treasure, she finds reason to give thanks unto him that kept it. As he is a fool that hath a price in his hand to get wisdom, and wants an heart; so is he unthankful, that hath an heart to get wisdom, and hath no price in his hand: a price not countervailable to what he seeks, but retributary to him of whom he seeks. How shameful is it to come always with close hands to them that teach us the great mysteries of salvation!

Expectation is no better than a kind enemy to good deserts. We lose those objects which we overlook. Many had been admired, if they had not been overmuch befriended by fame; who now, in our judgment, are cast as much below their rank, as they were fore-imagined above it. This disadvantage had wise Solomon with this stranger, whom rumour had bid to look for incredible excellencies; yet so wonderful were the graces of Solomon, that they overcame the highest expectation, and the liberalest belief: so, as when she saw the architecture of his buildings, the provisions of his tables, the order of his attendants, the religion of his sacrifices, she confessed both her unjust incredulity, in not believing the report of his wisdom, and the injury of report in understanding it. "I believed not the words till I came, and mine eyes had seen it, and lo, the one half was not told me." Her eyes were more sure informers than her ears. She did not so much hear as see Solomon's wisdom in these real effects. His answers did not so much demonstrate it, as his prudent government. There are some whose speeches are witty, while their carriage is weak; whose deeds are incongruities, while their words are apophthegms. It is not worth the name of wisdom that may be heard only, and not seen. Good discourse is but the froth of wisdom; the pure and solid substance of it is in well-framed actions; "If we know these things, happy are we if we do them."

And if this great person admired the wisdom, the buildings, the domestic order of Solomon, and chiefly his stately ascent into the house of the Lord, how should our souls be taken up with wonder at thee, O thou true Son of David, and Prince of everlasting Peace, who receivedst the Spirit not by measure! who hast built this glorious house not made with hands, even the heaven of heavens! whose infinite providence hath sweetly disposed of all the family of thy creatures, both in heaven and earth; and who, lastly, didst "ascend up on high, and leddest captivity captive, and gavest gifts to men!"

So well had this studious lady profited by the lectures of that exquisite master, that now she envies, she magnifies none but them who may live within the air of Solomon's wisdom: "Happy are thy men, and happy are thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom!" as if she could have been content to have changed her throne for the footstool of Solomon. It is not easy to conceive, how great a blessing it is to live under those lips, which do both preserve knowledge and utter it. If we were not glutted with good counsel, we should find no relish in any worldly contentment, in comparison hereof: but he that is full despiseth an honey-comb.

She, whom her own experience had taught how happy a thing it is to have a skilful pilot sitting at the stern of the state, blesseth Israel for Solomon, blesseth God for Israel, blesseth Solomon and Israel mutually in each other; "Blessed be the Lord thy God which delighteth in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel. Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king to do judgment and justice." It was not more Solomon's advancement to be king of Israel, than it was the advancement of Israel to be governed by a Solomon. There is no earthly proof of God's love to any nation, comparable to the substitution of a wise and pious governor: to him we owe our peace, our life, and, which is deservedly dearer, the life of our souls, the gospel. But, O God, how much hast thou loved thine Israel for ever, in that thou hast set over it that righteous Branch of Jesse, whose name is "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; in whose days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely! Sing, O heaven, and rejoice, O earth, and break forth into singing, O mountains; for God hath comforted his people, and will have everlasting mercy upon his afflicted."

The queen of Sheba did not bring her gold and precious stones to look on, or to re-carry, but to give to a wealthier than herself. She gives therefore to Solomon a hundred and twenty talents of gold, besides costly stones and odours. He, that hath made silver in Jerusalem as stones, is yet richly presented on all hands. The rivers still run into the sea; to him that hath shall be given. How should we bring unto thee, O thou King of heaven, the purest gold of thine own graces, the sweetest odours of our obediences! Was not this withal a type of that homage which should be done unto thee, O Saviour, by the heads of the nations? "The kings of Tarshish and the isles bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts; yea, all kings shall worship thee, all nations shall serve thee!" They cannot enrich themselves, but by giving unto thee.

It could not stand with Solomon's magnificence to receive rich courtesies without a return; the greater the person was, the greater was the obligation of requital. The gifts of mean persons are taken but as tributes of duty. It is dishonourable to take from equals, and not to retribute; there was not therefore more freedom in her gift, than in her receipt; her own will was the measure of both; she gave what she would, she received whatsoever she would ask; and she had little profited by Solomon's school, if she had not learned to ask the best. She returns therefore more richly laden than she came: she gave to Solomon, as a thankful client of wisdom; Solomon returns to her, as a munificent patron, according to the liberality of a king. We shall be sure to be gainers by whatsoever we give unto thee, O thou God of wisdom and peace! O that we could come, from the remote regions of our infidelity and worldliness, to learn wisdom of thee, who both teachest and givest it abundantly, without upbraiding, without grudging, and could bring with us the poor presents of our faithful desires and sincere services! how wouldst thou receive us with a gracious acceptation, and send us away laden with present comfort, with eternal glory!

CONTEMPLATION VII.—SOLOMON'S DEFECTION.

SINCE the first man Adam, the world hath not yielded either so great an example of wisdom, or so fearful an example of apostasy, as Solomon. What human knowledge Adam had in the perfection of nature by creation, Solomon had by infusion, both fully, both from one fountain. If Adam called all creatures by their names, Solomon spake from the cedars of Lebanon, to the moss that springs out of the wall; and, besides these vegetables, there was no beast, nor fowl, nor fish, nor creeping thing that escaped his discourse. Both fell, both fell by one means; as Adam, so might Solomon have said, "The woman deceived me." It is true, indeed, that Adam fell as all, Solomon as one, yet so as that this one is the pattern of the frailty of all. If knowledge could have given an immunity from sin, both had stood. Affections are those feet of the soul, on which it either stands or falls; "Solomon loved many outlandish women." I wonder not if the wise king miscarried; every word hath bane enough for a man. Women, many women, outlandish, idolatrous, and those not only had, but doated on; sex, multitude, nation, condition, all conspired to the ruin of a Solomon. If one woman undid all mankind, what marvel is it if many women undid one? yet, had those many been the daughters of Israel, they had tempted him only to lust, not to misdevotion; now there were of those nations, whereof the Lord had said to the children of Israel, "Go not ye in to them, nor let them come in to you, for surely they will turn your hearts after their gods." To them did Solomon join in love; who can marvel, if they disjoined his heart from God? Satan hath found this bait to take so well, that he never changed it since he crept into Paradise. How many have we known, whose heads have been broken with their own rib!

In the first world, the sons of God saw the daughters of men, and took them wives of all they liked; they multiplied not children, but iniquities. Balaam knew well, if the dames of Moab could make the Israelites wanton, they should soon make them idolaters. All lies open, where the covenant is not both made with the eye, and kept.

It was the charge of God to the kings of Israel, before they were, that they should not multiply wives. Solomon hath gone beyond the stakes of the law, and now is ready to lose himself amongst a thousand bedfellows. Whoso lays the reins in the neck of his carnal appetite, cannot promise where he will rest. O Solomon, where was thy wisdom, while thine affections run away with thee into so wild a voluptuousness? What boots it thee to discourse of all things, while thou misknowest thyself? The perfections of speculation do not argue the inward power of self-government: the eye may be clear, while the hand is palsied. It is not so much to be heeded, how the soul is informed, as how it is disciplined; the light of knowledge doth well, but the due order of the affections doth better. Never any mere man, since the first, knew so much as Solomon; many that have known less, have had more command of themselves. A competent estate, well husbanded, is better than a vast patrimony neglected.

There can be no safety to that soul, where is not a strait curb upon our desires. If our lusts be not held under as slaves, they will rule as tyrants. Nothing can prevent the extremity of our miscarriage, but early and strong denials of our concupiscence: had Solomon done this, delicacy and lawless greatness, had not led him into these bogs of intemperance.

The ways of youth are steep and slippery, wherein as it is easy to fall, so it is commonly relieved with pity; but the wanton inordinations of age are not more unseasonable than odious; yet, behold, Solomon's younger years were studious and innocent, his over-hastened age was licentious and misgoverned: "For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods." If any age can secure us from the danger of a spiritual fall, it is our last; and if any man's old age might secure him, it was Solomon's, the beloved of God, the oracle, the miracle of wisdom: who would have looked but that the blossoms of so hopeful a spring should have yielded a goodly and pleasant fruit in the autumn of age? Yet behold even Solomon's old age vicious. There is no time wherein we can be safe, while we carry this body of sin about us; youth is impetuous, mid age stubborn, old age weak, all dangerous: say not now, "The fury of my youthful flashes is over, I shall henceforth find my heart calm and impregnable;" while thou seest old Solomon doating upon his concubines, yea, upon their idolatry.

It is no presuming upon time, or means, or strength. How many have begun and proceeded well, who yet have ashamed themselves in their last stage! If God uphold us not, we cannot stand: if God uphold us, we cannot fall. When we are at the strongest, it is the best to be weak in ourselves; and, when at our weakest, strong in him, in whom we can do all things.

I cannot yet think so hard of Solomon, that he would project his person to Ashtaroth the goddess of the Sidonians, or Milchom the idol of the Ammonites, or Chemosh the abomination of Moab. He that knew all things from the shrub to the cedar, could not be ignorant that these statues were but stocks, or stones, or metals, and the powers resembled by them devils. It is not like he could be so insensate to adore such deities; but so far was the uxorious king blinded with affection, that he gave not passage only to the idolatry of his heathenish wives, but furtherance.

So did he doat upon their persons, that he humoured them in their sins; their act is therefore his, because his eyes winked at it, his hand advanced it. He that built a temple to the living God, for himself and Israel, in Sion, built a temple to Chemosh in the Mount of Scandal, for his mistresses of Moab, in the very face of God's house. No hill about Jerusalem was free from a chapel of devils; each of his dames had their puppets, their altars, their incense: because Solomon feeds them in their superstition, he draws the sin home to himself, and is branded for what he should have forbidden. Even our very permission appropriates crimes to us. We need no more guiltiness of any sin, than our willing toleration.

Who can but yearn, and fear, to see the woeful wreck of so rich and goodly a vessel? O Solomon, wert not thou he, whose younger years God honoured with a message and style of love? to whom God twice appeared, and, in a gracious vision, renewed the covenant of his favour? whom he singled out from all the generation of men, to be the founder of that glorious temple, which was no less clearly the type of heaven, than thou wert of Christ, the son of the everliving God? Wert not thou that deep sea of wisdom, which God ordained to send forth rivers and fountains of all divine and human knowledge to all nations, to all ages? wert not thou one of those select secretaries, whose hand it pleased the Almighty to employ in three pieces of the divine monuments of sacred scriptures? Which of us dares ever hope to aspire unto thy graces? which of us can promise to secure ourselves from thy ruins? We fall, O God, we fall to the lowest hell, if thou prevent us not, if thou sustain us not! "Uphold thou me, according to thy word, that I may live, and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." All our weakness is in ourselves, all our strength is in thee. O God, be thou strong in our weakness, that our weak knees may be ever steady in thy strength.

But, in the midst of the horror of this spectacle, able to affright all the sons of men, behold some glimpse of comfort. Was it of Solomon that David his father prophesied; "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand?" If sensible grace, yet final mercy was not taken from that beloved of God; in the hardest of this winter, the sap was gone down to the root, though it showed not in the branches. Even while Solomon removed, that word stood fast. "He shall be my son, and I will be his father." He that foresaw his sin, threatened and limited his correction. "If he break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit his transgression with a rod, and his iniquity with stripes; nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail; my covenant with

I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my mouth." Behold, the favour of God doth not depend upon Solomon's obedience! If Solomon shall suffer his faithfulness to fail towards his God, God will not requite him with the failing of his faithfulness to Solomon; if Solomon break his covenant with God, God will not break his covenant with the father of Solomon, with the son of David: he shall smart, he shall not perish. O gracious word of the God of all mercies, able to give strength to the languishing, comfort to the despairing, to the dying, life! Whatsoever we are, thou wilt be still thyself, O Holy One of Israel, true to thy covenant, constant to thy decree; the sins of thy chosen can neither frustrate thy counsel, nor outstrip thy mercies.

Now I see Solomom, of a wanton lover, a grave preacher of mortification; I see him quenching those inordinate flames with the tears of his repentance. Methinks I hear him sighing deeply, betwixt every word of that his solemn penance which he would needs enjoin himself before all the world, "I have applied my heart to know the wickedness of folly, even the foolishness of madness, and I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is as nets and snares, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall be delivered from her, but the sinner shall be taken by her."

Solomon was taken as a sinner, delivered as a penitent. His soul escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare was broken, and he delivered. It is good for us that he was both taken and delivered; taken, that we might not presume; and, that we might not despair, delivered. He sinned, that we might not sin; he recovered, that we may not sink under our sin.

But, O the justice of God, inseparable from his mercy; Solomon's sin shall not escape the rod of men: rather than so wise an offender shall want enemies, God shall raise up three adversaries unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite, Bezon the king of Aram, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, whereof two were foreign, one domestical. Nothing but love and peace sounded in the name of Solomon, nothing else was found in his reign, while he held in good terms with his God; but, when once he fell foul with his Maker, all things began to be troubled. There are whips laid up against the time of Solomon's foreseen offence, which are now brought forth for his correction. On purpose was Hadad, the son of the king of Edom, hid in a corner of Egypt, from the sword of David and Joab, that he might be reserved for a scourge to the exorbitant son of David. God would have us make account that our peace ends with our innocence. The same sin that sets debate betwixt God and us, arms the creatures against us; it were pity we should be at any quiet, while we are fallen out with the God of peace.

BOOK XVIII.

CONTEMPLATION I.—REHOBOAM.

WHO would not but have looked that seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines, should have furnished Solomon's palace with choice of heirs, and have peopled Israel with royal issue? and now, behold Solomon hath by all these but one son, and him by an Ammonitess! Many a poor man hath an houseful of children by one wife, while this great king has but one son by many housefuls of wives. Fertility is not from the means, but from the author: it was for Solomon that David sung, of old, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward!" How oft doth God deny this heritage of heirs, where he gives the largest heritage of lands, and gives most of these living possessions, where he gives least of the dead, that his blessings may be acknowledged free unto both, entailed upon neither!

As the greatest persons cannot give themselves children, so the wisest cannot give their children wisdom. Was it not of Rehoboam that Solomon said, "I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun, because I should leave it to the man that shall be after me; and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool; yet shall he *rule over all* my labour, wherein I have laboured, and showed myself wise under the sun?" All Israel found that Solomon's wit was not propagated: many a fool hath had a wiser son than this wisest father; amongst many sons, it is no news to find some one defective; Solomon hath but one son, and he no miracle of wisdom. God gives purposely so eminent an instance, to teach men to look up to heaven, both for heirs and graces.

Solomon was both the king of Israel, and the father of Rehoboam, when he was scarce out of his childhood: Rehoboam enters into the kingdom at a ripe age; yet Solomon was the man, and Rehoboam the child. Age is no just measure of wisdom; there are beardless sages and gray-headed children; not the ancient are wise, but the wise are ancient. Israel wanted not for thousands that were wiser than Rehoboam: yet, because they knew him to be the son of Solomon, no man makes question of his government: in the case of succession into kingdoms we may not look into the qualities of the person, but into the right. So secure is Solomon of the people's fidelity to David's seed, that he follows not his father's example, in setting his son by him in his own throne; here was no danger of a rivality to enforce it, no eminency in the son to merit it: it sufficeth him to know that no bond can be surer than the natural allegiance of subjects. I do not find that the following kings stood upon the confirmation of their people; but, as those that knew the way to their throne, ascended their steps without aid. As yet the sovereignty of David's house was green and unsettled: Israel therefore doth not now come to attend Rehoboam, but Rehoboam goes up to meet Israel; they come not to his Jerusalem, but he goes to their Shechem: "To Shechem were all Israel come to make him king." If loyalty drew them together, why not rather to Jerusalem? there the majesty of his father's temple, the magnificence of his palace, the very stones in those walls, besides the strength of his guard, had pleaded strongly for their subjection. Shechem had been many ways fatal, was every way incommodious. It is an infinite help or disadvantage that arises from circumstances: the very place puts Israel in mind of a rebellion; there Abimelech had raised up his treacherous usurpation over, and against his brethren; there Gaal against Abimelech; there was Joseph sold by his brethren; as if the very soil had been stained with perfidiousness. The time is no less ill chosen; Rehoboam had ill counsel ere he bewrayed it; for had he speedily called up Israel, before Jeroboam could have been sent for out of Egypt, he had found the way clear; a little delay may lose a great deal of opportunity; what shall we say of both but that misery is led in by infatuation?

Had not Israel been somewhat predisposed to a mutiny, they had never sent into Egypt for such a spokesman as Jeroboam, a fugitive, a traitor to Solomon: long had that crafty conspirator lurked in a foreign court. The alliances of princes are not ever necessary bonds of friendship: the brother-in-law of Solomon harbours this snake in his bosom, and gives that heat, which is repaid with a sting to the posterity of so near an ally; and now Solomon's death calls him back to his native soil. That Israel would entertain a rebel, it was an ill sign; worse yet, that they would countenance him; worst of all that they would employ him. Nothing doth more bewray evil intentions, than the choice of vicious agents. Those that mean well, will not hazard either the success, or credit of their actions upon offensive instruments; none but the sluttish will wipe their faces with foul cloths. Upright hearts would have said, as David did to God, so to his anointed; "Do not I hate them that hate thee? yea, I hate them with a perfect hatred." Jeroboam's head had been a fit present to have been tendered unto their new king; and now, instead thereof, they tender themselves to Jeroboam, as the head of their faction.

Had not Rehoboam wanted spirits, he had first, after Solomon's example, done justice to his father's traitor, and then have treated of mercy towards his subjects; the people soon found the weakness of their new sovereign, else they durst not have spoken to him by so obnoxious a tongue; "Thy father made our yoke grievous, make thou it lighter, and we will serve thee." Doubtless the crafty head of Jeroboam was in this suit which his mouth uttered in the name of Israel: nothing could have been more subtile; it seemed a promise, it was a threat; that which seemed a supplication, was a complaint; humility was but a vail for discontentment; one hand held a paper, the other a sword. Had they said, Free us from tributes, the capitulation had been gross, and strongly favouring of sedition; now they say, "Ease us;" they profess his power to impose, and their willingness to yield; only craving favour in the weight of the imposition. If Rehoboam yield, he blemishes his father; if he deny, he endangers his kingdom; his wilfulness shall seem worthily to abandon his sceptre, if he stick at so unreasonable a suit: surely Israel came with a purpose to cavil; Jeroboam had secretly troubled these waters, that he might fish more gainfully. One malcontent is enough to embroil a whole kingdom.

How harshly must it needs sound in the ears of Rehoboam, that the first word he hears from his people is a querulous challenge of his father's government; "Thy father made our yoke grievous." For ought I see, the suggestion was not more spiteful than unjust. Where was the weight of this yoke, the toil of these services? Here were none of the turmoils of war; no trainings, marchings, encampings, entrenchings, watchings, minings, sieges, fortifications; none of that tedious world of work that attends hostility; Solomon had not his name for nought; all was calm, during that long reign; and if they had paid dear for their peace, they had no cause to complain of a hard match; the warlike times of Saul and David had exhausted their blood, together with their substance; what ingratitude was this to cry out for ease! Yea, but that peace brought forth costly and laborious buildings; God's house, and the king's, the walls of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer, the cities of store, the cities of defence, could not rise without many a shoulder: true, but not of any Israelites; the remainders of Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, were put to all the drudgery of these great works: the tasks of Israel were easy and ingenuous, free from servility, free from painfulness. But the charge was theirs, whosoever's was the labour. The diet of so endless a retinue, the attendance of his seraglio, the purveyance for his forty thousand stables, the cost of his sacrifices, must needs weigh heavy, certainly, if it had lain on none but his own. But wherefore went Solomon's navy every three years to Ophir? to what use served the six hundred threescore and six talents of gold, that came in one year to his exchequer? wherefore served the large tributes of foreign nations? how did he make silver to be in Jerusalem as stones if the exactions were so pressive? The multitude is ever prone to pick quarrels with their governors; and whom they feared alive, to censure dead. The benefits of so quiet and happy a reign are passed over in silence; the grievances are recounted with clamour. Who can hope that merit or greatness can shield him from obloquy, when Solomon is traduced to his own loins?

The proposition of Israel puts Rehoboam to a deliberation: "Depart ye for three days, then come again to me." I hear no other word of his that argued wisdom; not to give sudden resolutions, in cases of importance, was a point that might well beseem the son of Solomon. I wonder that he, who had so much wit as to call for leisure in his answer, should show so little wit in the improving of that leisure, in the return of that answer. Who cannot but hope well to see the grey heads of Solomon's secret council called to Rehoboam's cabinet? As counsellors, as ancient as Solomon's, they cannot choose but see the best, the safest course for their new sovereign: they had learned of their old master, that "A soft answer appeaseth wrath:" wisely therefore do they advise him, "If thou wilt be a servant to this people this day, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever." It was an easy condition, with one mouthful of breath to purchase an everlasting homage; with one gentle motion of his tongue, to bind all people's hearts to his allegiance for ever. Yet, as if the motion had been unfit, a new council-table is called. Well might this people say, What will not Rehoboam grudge us if he think much to give us good words for a kingdom? There is not more wisdom in taking variety of advice, where the matter is doubtful, than folly when it is plain. The young heads are consulted; this very change argues weakness: some reason might be pleaded for passing from the younger council to the aged; none for the contrary. Age brings experience; and it is a shame, if with the ancient be not wisdom. Youth is commonly rash, heady, insolent, ungoverned, wedded to will, led by humour, a rebel to reason, a subject to passion, fitter to execute than advise. Green wood is ever shrinking and warping, whereas the well-seasoned holds a constant firmness. Many a life, many a soul, many a flourishing state hath been ruined by undisciplined monitors; such were these of Rehoboam, whose great stomach tells them, that this conditionating of subjects was no other than an affront to their new master, and suggests to them, how unfit it is for majesty to brook so saucy a treaty; how requisite and princely to crush this presumption in the egg. As scorning therefore to be braved by the base vulgar, they put words of greatness and terror in their new prince: "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins; my father made your yoke heavy, I will add to your yoke. My father hath chastised you with whips, I will chastise you with scorpions." The very words have stings: now must Israel needs think, How cruel will this man's hands be, when he thus draws blood with his tongue! Men are not wont to speak out their worst; who can endure the hopes of him that promiseth tyranny? There can be no good use of an indefinite profession of rigour and severity; fear is an unsafe guardian of any state, much less of an unsettled: which was yet worse, not the sins of Israel were threatened, nor their purses, but their persons; neither had they desired a remission of justice, but of exactions: and now they hear of nothing but burdens, and scourges, and scorpions.

Here was a prince and people well met; I do not find them sensible of ought, save their own profit; they do not say, Religion was corrupted in the shutting up of thy father's days; idolatry found the free favour of priests, and temples, and sacrifices. Begin thy reign with God: purge the church, demolish those piles of abomination, abandon those idol-mongers, restore devotion to her purity. They are all for their penny, for their ease. He, on the other side, is all for his will, for an imperious sovereignty, without any regard, either of their reformation or satisfaction: they were worthy of load, that cared for nothing but their backs: and he worthy of such subjects, who professed to affect their misery and torment.

Who would not but have looked any whither for the cause of this evil, rather than to heaven? yet the holy God challenges it to himself; the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform this saying by Abijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam. As sin is a punishment of sin, it is a part of justice: the Holy One of Israel doth not abhor to use even the grossest sin to his own just purposes. While our wills are free to our own choice, his decrees are as necessary as just; Israel had forsaken the Lord, and worshipped Ashtaroth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Chemosh, and Milchom: God owes them and Solomon a whipping: the frowardness of Rehoboam shall pay it them. I see Jeroboam's plot, the people's insolence, the young men's misadvice, the prince's unreasonable austerity, meeting together, through the wise Providence of the Almighty, unwittingly to accomplish his most just decree. All these might have done otherwise, for any force that was offered to their will; all would no more do otherwise than if there had been no predetermination in heaven; that God may be magnified in his wisdom and justice, while man wittingly perisheth in his folly.

That three days' expectation had warned these smoking Israelites and made them ready for a combustion; upon so peremptory a resolution of rigour, the flame bursts out which all the waters of the well of

Bethlehem could never quench. The furious multitude flies out into a desperate revolt; "What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel; now, see to thine own house, David."

How durst these seditious mouths mention David in defiance? One would have thought that very name had been able to have tempered their fury, and to have contained them within the limits of obedience. It was the father of Rehoboam, and the son of David, that had led Israel into idolatry; Solomon hath drawn contempt upon his father, and upon his son. If Israel have cast off their God, is it marvel that they shake off his anointed? Irreligion is the way to disobedience; there can be no true subjection, but out of conscience; they cannot make conscience of civil duties, who make none of divine.

In vain shall Rehoboam hope to prevail by his officer, when himself is rejected. The persons of princes carry in them characters of majesty; when their presence works not, how should their message? If Adoram solicit the people too late with good words they answer him with stones. Nothing is more untractable and violent than an enraged multitude. It was time for Rehoboam to betake himself to his chariot: he saw those stones were thrown at him in his Adoram. As the messenger suffers for the master, so the master suffers in his messenger. Had Rehoboam been in Adoram's clothes this death had been his; only flight can deliver him from those that might have been subjects: Jerusalem must be his refuge against the conspiracy of Shechem.

Blessed be God for lawful government: even a mutinous body cannot want a head. If the rebellious Israelites have cast off their true sovereign, they must choose a false: Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, must be the man. He had need be skilful, and sit sure, that shall back the horse which hath cast his rider. Israel could not have anywhere met with more craft and courage than they found in this leader.

Rehoboam returns to Jerusalem lighter by a crown than he went forth; Judah and Benjamin still stick fast to their loyalty: the example of a general rebellion cannot make them unfaithful to the house of David: God will ever reserve a remnant free from the common contagion. Those tribes, to approve their valour no less than their fidelity, will fight against their brethren for their prince, and will hazard their lives to reduce the crown to the son of Solomon. A hundred and fourscore thousand of them are up in arms, ready to force Israel to their denied subjection. No noise sounded on both parts but military; no man thought of any thing but blood: when suddenly God sends his prophet to forbid the battle, Shemaiah comes with a message of cessation, "Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel; return every man to his house; for this thing is from me, saith the Lord." The word of one silly prophet dismisses these mighty armies: he, that would not lay down the threats of his rigour, upon the advice of his ancient counsellors, will lay down his sword upon the word of a seer. Shall we envy or shame to see how much the prophets of the Old Testament could do; how little those of the New? If our commission be no less from the same God, the difference of success cannot go away unrevenged.

There was yet some grace in Rehoboam, that he would not spurn against that which God challenged as his own work. Some godless ruffian would have said, Whosoever is the author, I will be revenged on the instruments. Rehoboam hath learned this lesson of his grandfather, "I held my peace, because thou, Lord, hadst done it." If he might strive with the multitude, he knew it was no striving with his Maker: quietly therefore doth he lay down his arms, not daring after that prohibition, to seek the recovery of his kingdom by blood.

Where God's purposes are hid from us, we must take the fairest ways of all lawful remedies: but where God hath revealed his determination, we must sit down in an humble submission: our struggling may aggravate, cannot redress our miseries.

CONTEMPLATION II.—JEROBOAM.

As there was no public and universal conflict betwixt the ten tribes and the two, so no peace. Either king found reason to fortify the borders of his own territories; Shechem was worthy to be dear to Jeroboam: a city, as of old, seasoned with many treasons, so now auspicious to his new usurpation. The civil defection was soon followed by the spiritual. As there are near respects betwixt God and his anointed, so there is great affinity betwixt treason and idolatry; there is a connexion betwixt, "Fear God and honour the king;" and no less betwixt the neglects of both. In vain shall a man look for faith in an irreligious heart.

Next to Achitophel, I do not find that Israel yielded a craftier head than Jeroboam's: so hath he plotted this conspiracy, that, whatever fall, there is no place for a challenge; not his own intrusion, but Israel's election, hath raised him to their throne: neither is his cunning less in holding a stolen sceptre. Thus he thinks in himself, if Israel have made me their king, it is but a pang of discontentment; these violent thoughts will not last always; sudden fits have commonly sudden recoveries; their return to their loyalty shall forfeit my head, together with my crown; they cannot return to God and hold off from their lawful sovereign; they cannot return to Jerusalem, and keep off from God, from their loyalty: thrice a-year will their devotion call them up thither, besides the exigence of their frequent vows: how can they be mine, while that glorious temple is in their eye, while the magnificence of the royal palace of David and Solomon shall admonish them of their native allegiance; while, besides the solicitation of their brethren, the priests and Levites shall preach to them the necessity of their due obedience, and the abomination of their sacrifices in their wilful disobedience: while they shall by their presence, put themselves upon the mercy or justice of their lawful and forsaken prince? Either therefore I must divert them from Jerusalem, or else I cannot live and reign; it is no diverting them by a direct restraint; such prohibition would both endanger their utter distaste, and whet their desire to more eagerness: I may change religion, I may not inhibit it. So the people have a God, it sufficeth them: they shall have so much formality as may content them: their zeal is not so sharp but they can be well pleased with ease. I will proffer them both a more compendious, and more plausible worship; Jerusalem shall be supplied within mine own borders. Naturally men love to see the objects of their devotion; I will therefore feed their eyes with two golden representations of their god, nearer home; and what can be more proper, than those which Aaron devised of old to humour Israel?

Upon this pestilent ground, Jeroboam sets up two calves in Dan and Bethel, and persuades the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt." Oh the mischief that comes of wicked infidelity! It was God's prophet that had rent Jeroboam's garment into twelve pieces, and had given ten of them to him, in token of his sharing the ten tribes; who, with the same breath also, told him, that the cause of this distraction was their idolatry. Yet now will he institute an idolatrous service for the holding together of them, whom their idolatry had rent from their true sovereign to him. He says not, God hath promised me this kingdom; God hath conferred it; God shall find means to maintain his own act; I will obey him, let him dispose of me. The God of Israel is wise and powerful enough to fetch about his own designs; but, as if the devices of men were stronger than God's providence and ordination, he will be working out his own ends by profane policies. Jeroboam, being born an Israelite, and bred in the court of a Solomon, could not but know the express charge of God against the making of images, against the erecting of any rival altars to that of Jerusalem; yet now, that he sees both these may avail much to the advancing of his ambitious project, he sets up those images, those altars. Wicked men care not to make bold with God, in cases of their own commodity. If the laws of their Maker lie in the way of their profit or promotion, they either spurn them out, or tread upon them at pleasure. Aspiring minds will know no God but honour. Israel sojourned in Egypt, and brought home a golden calf; Jeroboam sojourns there, and brought home two: it is hard to dwell in Egypt untainted. Not to savour of the sins of the place we live in, is no less strange, than for wholesome liquor, tunned up in a musty vessel, not to smell of the cask. The best body may be infected in a contagious air. Let him beware of Egypt, that would be free from idolatry.

No sooner are Jeroboam's calves up, than Israel is down on their knees: their worship follows immediately upon the erection. How easily is the unstable vulgar carried into whatsoever religion of authority! The weathercock will look which way soever the wind blows: it is no marvel if his subjects be brutish, who hath made a calf his god.

Every accessary to sin is filthy, but the first authors of sin are abominable. How is Jeroboam branded in every of these sacred leaves! how do all ages ring of his fact, with the accent of dishonour and indignation! "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that made Israel to sin." It was a shame for Israel that it could be made to sin, by a Jeroboam: but O cursed name of Jeroboam, that would draw Israel to sin. The followers and abettors of evil are worthy of torment, but no hell is too deep for the leaders of public wickedness.

Religion is clothed with many requisite circumstances. As a new king would have a new god, so that new god must have new temples, altars, services, priests, solemnities: all these hath Jeroboam instituted; all these hath he cast in the same mould with his golden calves. False devotions doth not more cross than imitate the true. Satan is no less a counterfeit than an enemy of God; he knows it is more easy to adulterate religion, than to abolish it.

That which God ordained, for the avoidance of idolatry, is made the occasion of it: a limitation of his holy services to Jerusalem. How mischievously do wicked men pervert the wholesome institutions of God to their sin, to their bane!

Jeroboam could not be ignorant, how fearfully this very act was revenged upon Israel in the wilderness; yet he dares renew it in Dan and Bethel. No example of judgment can affright wilful offenders.

It is not the metal that makes their gods, but the worship, the sacrifices. What sacrifices could there be without priests? No religion could ever want sacred masters of divine ceremonies: God's clergy was select and honourable, branches of the holy stem of Aaron; Jeroboam rakes up his priests out of the channel of the multitude; all tribes, all persons, were good enough to his spurious devotion. Leaden priests are well fitted for golden deities. Religion receives either much honour or blemish, by the quality of those that serve at her altars. We are not worthy to profess ourselves servants of the true God, if we do not hold his service worthy of the best.

Jeroboam's calves must have sacrifices, must have solemn festivities, though in a day and month of his own devising. In vain shall we pretend to worship a god, if we grudge him the just days and rites of his worship.

It is strange, that he, who thought the dregs of the vulgar good enough for that priesthood, would grace those gods by acting their priest himself; and yet, behold where the new king of Israel stands before his new altar, with a sceptre in one hand, and a censer in the other, ready to sacrifice to his new gods, when the man of God comes from Judah with a message of judgment! O desperate condition of Israel, that was so far gone with impiety, that it yielded not one faithful monitor to Jeroboam! The time was, that the erecting of but a new altar, for memory, for monument, on the other side of Jordan, bred a challenge to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasses; and had cost much Israelitish blood, if the quarrelled tribes had not given a seasonable and pious satisfaction: and now, lo, how the stronger stomach of degenerated Israel can digest new altars, new temples, new gods! What a difference there is betwixt a church and kingdom newly breathing from affliction, and settled upon the lees of a misused peace!

But, O the patience and mercy of our long-suffering God, that will not strike a very Jeroboam unwarned! Judgment hovers over the heads of sinners, ere it light. If Israel afford not a bold reprover of Jeroboam, Judah shall. When the king of Israel is in all the height both of his state and superstition, honouring his solemn day with his richest devotion, steps forth a prophet of God, and interrupts that glorious service with a loud inclamation of judgment. Doubtless the man wanted not wit to know what displeasure, what danger, must needs follow so unwelcome a message yet dares he, upon the commission of God, do this affront to an idolatrous king, in the midst of all his awful magnificence. The prophets of God go upon many a thankless errand. He is no messenger for God, that either knows or fears the faces of men.

It was the altar, not the person of Jeroboam, which the prophet thus threatens; yet not the stones are stricken, but the founder, in both their apprehensions. So dear are the devices of our own brain to us, as if they were incorporated into ourselves. There is no opposition whereof we are so sensible as that of religion.

That the royal altar should be thus polluted by dead men's bones, and the blood of the priests, was not more unpleasing, than that all this should be done by a child of the house of David; for Jeroboam well saw, that the throne and the altar must stand or fall together; that a son of David could not have such power over the altar, without an utter subversion of the government, of the succession; therefore is he thus galled with this comminatory prediction. The rebellious people who had said, "What portion have we in David?" hear now, that David will perforce have a portion in them; and might well see, what beasts they had made themselves in worshipping the image of a beast, and sacrificing to such a god, as could not preserve his own altar from violation and ruin.

All this while I do not see this zealous prophet laying his hand to the demolition of this idolatrous altar, or threatening a knife to the author of this depravation of religion; only his tongue smites both, not with foul, but sharp words of menace, not of reproach. It was for Josias, a king, to shed the blood of those sacrificers, to deface those altars: prophets are for the tongue, princes for the hand; prophets must only denounce judgment, princes execute.

Future things are present to the Eternal. It was some two hundred and sixty years, ere this prophecy should be fulfilled; yet the man of God speaks of it as now acting. What are some centuries of years to the Ancient of days? How slow, and yet how sure is the pace of God's revenge! It is not in the power of time to frustrate God's determinations; there is no less justice, nor severity in a delayed punishment.

What a perfect record there is of all names in the roll of heaven, before they be, after they are past! Whatever seeming contingency there is in their imposition, yet they fall under the certainty of a decree, and are better known in heaven ere they be, than on earth while they are. He, that knows what names we shall have, before we or the world have a being, doth not oft reveal this piece of his knowledge to his creature; here he doth, naming the man that should be two hundred years after; for more assurance of the event, that Israel may say, this man speaks from a God who knows what shall be. There cannot be a more sure evidence of a true godhead, than the foreknowledge of those things, whose causes have yet no hope of being; but because the proof of this prediction was no more certain than remote, a present demonstration shall convince the future; "The altar shall rend in pieces, the ashes shall be scattered." How amazedly must the seduced Israelites needs look upon this miracle! and why do they not think with themselves, While these stones rend, why are our hearts whole? Of what an overruling power is the God whom we have forsaken, that can thus tear the altars of his corrivals! How shall we stand before his vengeance, when the very stones break at the word of his prophet? Perhaps some beholders were thus affected; but Jeroboam, whom it most concerned, instead of bowing his knees for humiliation, stretched forth his hand for revenge, and cries, Lay hold on him. Resolute wickedness is impatient of a reproof, and, instead of yielding to the voice of God, rebelleth. Just and discreet reprehension doth not more reform sinners than exasperate others.

How easy is it for God to cool the courage of proud Jeroboam! The hand which his rage stretches out, dries up, and cannot be pulled back again; and now stands the king of Israel, like some antic statue, in a posture of impotent endeavour, so disabled to the hurt of the prophet, that he cannot command that piece of himself. What are the great potentates of the world, in the powerful hand of the Almighty! Tyrants cannot be so harmful, as they are malicious.

The strongest heart may be brought down with affliction: now the stout stomach of Jeroboam is fallen to an humble deprecation; "Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again." It must needs be a great strait that could drive a proud heart to beg mercy, where he bent his persecution; so doth Jeroboam, holding it no scorn to be beholden to an enemy. In extremities the worst men can be content to sue for favour, where they have spent their malice.

It well becomes the prophets of God to be merciful. I do not see this seer to stand upon terms of exprobation, and overly contestations with Jeroboam, to say, Thine intentions to me were cruel: had thine hand prevailed, I should have sued to thee in vain; continue ever a spectacle of the fearful justice of thy Maker, whom thou hast provoked by thine idolatry, whom thou wouldst have smitten in my persecution; but he meekly sues for Jeroboam's release, and, that God might abundantly magnify both his power and mercy, is heard, and answered with success. We do no whit savour of heaven, if we have not learned to do good for evil.

When both wind and sun, the blasts of judgment and the beams of favour, met together to work upon Jeroboam, who would not look that he should have cast off his cumberous and misbeseeming cloak of his idolatry, and have said, Lord, thou hast stricken me in justice, thou hast healed me in mercy; I will provoke thee no more. This hand, which thou hast restored, shall be consecrated to thee, in pulling down these bold abominations; yet now, behold, he goes on in his old courses, and, as if God had neither done him good nor evil, lives and dies idolatrous. No stone is more hard or insensate than a sinful heart: the changes of judgment and mercy do but obdure it, instead of melting.

CONTEMPLATION III.—THE SEDUCED PROPHET.

JEROBOAM's hand is amended, his soul is not; that continues still dry and inflexible; yet, while he is unthankful to the author of his recovery, he is thankful to the instrument; he kindly invites the prophet whom he had threatened, and will remunerate him whom he endeavoured to punish. The worst men may be sensible of bodily favours. Civil respects may well stand with gracelessness. Many a one would be liberal of their purses, if they might be allowed to be niggardly of their obedience.

As God, so his prophet, cares not for these waste courtesies, where he sees main duties neglected. More piety would have done well with less compliment. The man of God returns a blunt and peremptory denial to so bounteous an offer; "If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place." Kindness is more safely done in an idolater, than taken from him; that which is done to him obligeth him, that which is taken from him obligeth us; this obligation to us may be occasion of his good, our obligation to him may occasion our hurt; the surest way is to keep aloof from the infectiously wicked.

The prophet is not uncivil, to reject the favour of a prince without some reason; he yields no reason of his refusal but the command of his God. God hath charged him, "Eat no bread, nor drink no water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest." It is not for a prophet to plead human or carnal grounds for the actions of his function: he may not move but upon a divine warrant. Would this seer have looked with the eyes of flesh and blood, he might have found many arguments for his yielding: He is a king that invites me; his reward, by enriching me, may benefit many; and who knows how much my further conversation may prevail to reform him? how can he be but well prepared for good counsel by a miraculous cure? how gainfully should my receipt of a temporal courtesy be exchanged with a spiritual to him? all Israel will follow him either in idolatry or reformation; which way can be devised of doing so great service to God and the church, as by reclaiming him? what can yield so great likelihood of his reclamation, as the opportunity of my further entireness with him? But the prophet dares not argue cases, where he had a command; whatever become of Jeroboam and Israel, God must be obeyed; neither profit nor hopes may carry us cross to the word of our Maker. How safe had this seer been, if he had kept him ever upon this sure guard, which he no sooner leaves than he miscarries.

So deeply doth God detest idolatry, that he forbids his prophet to eat the bread, to drink the water, of a people infected with this sin; yea, to tread in those very steps which their feet have touched. If this inhibition were personal, yet the grounds of it are common. No pestilence should be more shunned than the conversation of the misreligious, or openly scandalous. It is no thank to us, if their familiarity do not infect us with their wickedness.

I know not what to think of an old prophet that dwells in Bethel, within the air of Jeroboam's idol, within the noise of his sacrifices; that lives where the man of God dares not eat; that permitted his sons to be present at that idolatrous service. If he were a prophet of God, what did he now in Bethel? why did he wink at the sin of Jeroboam? what needed a seer to come out of Judah, for the reproof of that sin, which was acted under his nose? why did he lie? why did his family partake with idolaters? if he were not a prophet of God, how had he true visions? how had he true messages from God? why did he second the menacing word of that prophet, whom he seduced? why did he desire that his own bones might be honoured with his sepulchre? Doubtless he was a prophet of God, but corrupt, resty, vicious. Prophecy doth not always presuppose sanctification; many a one hath had visions from God, who shall never enjoy the vision of God. A very Balaam, in his ecstasies, hath so clear revelation of the Messiah to come, as scarce ever any of the holiest prophets; yea, his very ass hath both her mouth miraculously opened, and her eyes, to see and notify that angel, which was hid from her master: yea, Satan himself sometimes receives notice from God of his future actions; which else that evil spirit could neither foretell nor foresee. These kinds of graces are both rare and common; rare, in that they are seldom given to any; common, in that they are indifferently given to the evil, and to the good. A little holiness is worth much illumination.

Whether out of envy, to hear that said by the seer of Judah, which he either knew not or smothered; to hear that done by another, which he could not have effected, and could not choose but admire; or whether out of desire to make trial of the fidelity of so powerful a messenger, the old prophet hastens to overtake, to recall that man of God, who had so defied his Bethel, whom he finds sitting faint and weary under an oak in the way, taking the benefit of that shade which he hated to receive from those contagious groves that he had left behind him; his habit easily bewrayed him, to a man of his own trade; neither doth his tongue spare to profess himself. The old prophet of Bethel invites him to return to a repast; and is answered with the same words wherewith Jeroboam's offer was repelled: the man of God varies not a syllable from his message. It concerns us to take good heed of our charge, when we go on God's errand. A denial doth but invite the importunate; what he cannot do by entreaty the old man tries to do by persuasion: "I am a prophet also as thou art, and an angel spake to me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water." There is no temptation so dangerous, as that which comes shrouded under a vail of holiness, and pretends authority from God himself. Jeroboam threatens, the prophet stands undaunted; Jeroboam fawns and promises, the prophet holds constant: now comes a grey-headed seer, and pleads a counter-message from God: the prophet yields and transgresses. Satan may affright us as a fiend, but he seduces us as an angel of light.

Who would have looked for a liar under hoary hairs, and a holy mantle? who would not have trusted that gravity, when there was no colour of any gain in the untruth? Nothing is so apt to deceive as the fairest semblances, as the sweetest words. We cannot err, if we believe not the speech for the person, but the person for the speech. Well might this man of God think, an aged man, a prophet, an old prophet, will not, sure, belie God unto a prophet; no man will forge a lie, but for an advantage. What can this man gain by this match, but the entertainment of an unprofitable guest? Perhaps though God would not allow me to feast with Jeroboam, yet pitying my faintness, he may allow me to eat with a prophet. Perhaps now that I have approved my fidelity in refusing the bread of Bethel, God thinks good to send me a gracious release of that strict charge. Why should I think, that God's revelations are not as free to others, as to me? and if this prophet hath received a countermand from an angel of God, how shall I not disobey God, if I do not follow him!

Upon this ground he returns with this deceitful host; and, when the meat was now in his mouth, receives the true message of death, from the same lips that brought him the false message of his invitation: thus saith the Lord, "Forasmuch, as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, but camest back, and hast eaten bread, and drunk water in the place forbidden thee, thy carcass shall not come to the sepulchre of thy fathers." O woeful prophet! when he looks on his host, he sees his executioner; while he is feeding of his body, he hears of his carcass; at the table he hears of his denied sepulchre; and all this for eating and drinking where he was forbidden by God, though bidden as from God. The violation of the least charge of a God is mortal. No pretences can warrant the transgression of a divine command: a word from God is pleaded on both sides; the one was received immediately from God, the other related mediately by man: one the prophet was sure of, the other was questionable. A sure word of God may not be left for an uncertain: an express charge of the Almighty admitteth not of any check: his will is but one, as himself is; and therefore it is out of the danger of contradiction.

Methinks I see the man of God change countenance at this sharp sauce of his pleasing morsels; his face beforehand is dyed with the paleness of death. Methinks I hear him urging many unkind expostulations with his injurious host, who yet dismisses him better provided for the ease of his journey than he found him. Perhaps this officiousness was out of desire to make some amends for this late seducement. It is a poor recompense, when he hath betrayed his life, and wronged the soul, to cast some courtesies upon the body.

This old Bethelite, that had taken pains to come and fetch the man of God into sin, will not now go back with him to accompany his departure. Doubtless he was afraid to be inwrapped in the judgment which he saw hanged over that obnoxious head. Thus the mischievous guides of wickedness leave a man, when they have led him to his bane; as familiar devils forsake their witches, when they have brought them once into fetters.

The man of God returns alone, careful, no doubt, and pensive for his offence, when a lion out of the wood meets, assaults, and kills him. O the just and severe judgments of the Almighty, who hath brought this fierce beast out of his wild ranges into the highway, to be the executioner of his offending servant! Doubtless this prophet was a man of great holiness, of singular fidelity, else he durst not have been God's herald to carry a message of defiance to Jeroboam, king of Israel, in the midst of all his royal magnificence; yet now, for varying from but a circumstance of God's command, though upon the suggestion of a divine warrant, is given for a prey to the lion. Our interest in God is so far from excusing our sin, that it aggravates it: of all others, the sin of a prophet shall not pass unrevenged.

The very wild beasts are led by a providence; their wise and powerful Creator knows how to serve himself of them. The lions guard one prophet, kill another, according to the commission received from their Maker. What sinner can hope to escape unpunished, when every creature of God is ready to be an avenger of evil? The beasts of the field were made to serve us, we to serve our Creator. When we forsake our homage to him that made us, it is no marvel if the beasts forget their duty to us, and deal with us not as masters, but as rebels. When a holy man buys so dearly such a slight frailty, of a credulous mistaking, what shall become of our heinous and presumptuous sins?

I cannot think but this prophet died in the favour of God: though by the teeth of the lion, his life was forfeited for example, his soul was safe; yea, his very carcass was left, though torn, yet fair, after those deadly grasps; as if God had said, I will only take thy breath from thee, as the penalty of thy disobedience: a lion shall do that which an apoplexy, or fever might do. I owe thee no further revenge than may be satisfied with thy blood.

Violent events do not always argue the anger of God; even death itself is to his servants a fatherly castigation.

But, O the unsearchable ways of the Almighty! the man of God sins, and dies speedily; the lying prophet that seduced him survives; yea, wicked Jeroboam enjoys his idolatry, and treads upon the grave of his reprover. There is neither favour in the delay of stripes, nor displeasure in the haste; rather whom God loves he chastises, as sharply, so speedily, while the rest prospers to condemnation: even the rod of a loving father may draw blood. How much happier is it for us, that we die now to live for ever, than that we live a while to die for ever!

Had this lion set upon the prophet for hunger, why did he not devour, as well as kill him? why did he not rather kill the beast than the man, since we know the nature of the lion such, that he is not wont to assail man, save in the extreme want of other prey? Certainly the same power that employed those fangs restrained them, that the world might see, it was not appetite that provoked the beast to this violence, but the overruling command of God. Even so, O Lord, thy powerful hand is over that roaring lion, that goes about continually seeking whom he may devour! thine hand withholds him, that though he may shed the blood of thine elect, yet he cannot hurt their souls; and while he doth those things which thou permittest and orderest, to thy just ends, yet he cannot do lesser things which he desireth, and thou permittest not.

The fierce beast stands by the carcass, as to avow his own act, and to tell who sent him, so to preserve that body which he had slain. O wonderful work of God! the executioner is turned guardian; and, as the officer of the Highest, commands all other creatures to stand aloof from his charge, and commands the fearful ass, that brought this burden thither, not to stir thence, but to stand ready prest, to carry it to the sepulchre: and now, when he hath sufficiently witnessed to all passengers that this act was not done upon his own hunger, but upon the quarrel of his Maker, he delivers up his charge to that old prophet, who was no less guilty of this blood than himself.

This old seducer had so much truth, as both to give a right commentary upon God's intention in this act, for the terror of the disobedient, and to give his voice to the certainty of that future judgment which his late guest had threatened to Israel: sometimes it pleaseth the wisdom of God to express and justify himself, even by the tongues of faulty instruments. Withal, he hath so much faith and courage, as to fetch that carcass from the lion; so much pity and compassion, as to weep for the man of God, to inter him in his own sepulchre; so much love, as to wish himself joined in death to that body which he had hastened unto death. It is hard to find a man absolutely wicked: some grace will bewray itself in the most forsaken breasts.

It is a cruel courtesy to kill a man, and then to help him to his grave; to betray a man with our breath, and then to bedew him with our tears. The prophet had needed no such friend, if he had not met with such an enemy: "The mercies of the wicked are cruel."

CONTEMPLATION IV.—JEROBOAM'S WIFE.

It is no measuring of God's favour by the line of outward welfare: Jeroboam, the idolatrous usurper of Israel, prospers better than the true heirs of David; he lives to see three successions in the throne of Judah; thus the ivy lives, when the oak is dead. Yet could not that misgotten crown of his keep his head always from aching: he hath his crosses too. God whips sometimes more than his own; his enemies smart from him as well as his children; his children in love, his enemies in judgment. Not simply the rod argues love, but the temper of the hand that wields it, and the back that feels it. First Jeroboam's hand was stricken, now his son; Abijah, the eldest, the best son of Jeroboam, is smitten with sickness. As children are but the pieces of their parents in another skin, so parents are no less stricken in their children, than in their natural limbs; Jeroboam doth not more feel his arm, than his son; not wicked men only, but beasts may have natural affections. It is no thank to any creature to love his own.

Nature wrought in Jeroboam, not grace: he is enough troubled with his son's disease, no whit bettered: I would have heard him say, God follows me with his afflictions, it is for mine impiety; what other measure can I expect from his justice? while mine idols stand, how can I look that my house should prosper? I will turn from my wickedness; O God, turn thou from thy wrath. These thoughts were too good for that obdurate heart: his son is sick, he is sorrowful; but, as an amazed man seeks to go forth at the wrong door, his distraction sends him to a false help; he thinks not of God, he thinks of his prophet; he thinks of the prophet that had foretold him he should be a king, he thinks not of the God of that prophet who made him a king. It is the property of a carnal heart to confine both his obligations and his hopes to the means, neglecting the Author of good. Vain is the respect that is given to the servant, where the master is contemned.

Extremity draws Jeroboam's thoughts to the prophet, whom else he had not cared to remember. The king of Israel had divines enow of his own, else he must needs have thought them miserable gods that were not worth a prophet: and, besides, there was an old prophet, if he yet survived, dwelling within the smoke of his palace, whose visions had been too well approved: why should Jeroboam send so far, to an Abijah!

Certainly his heart despised those base priests of his high places, neither could he trust either to the gods, or the clergy of his own making: his conscience rests upon the fidelity of that man whose doctrine he had forsaken. How did this idolater strive against his own heart, whilst he inwardly despised those whom he professed to honour, and inwardly honoured them whom he professed to despise! Wicked breasts are false to themselves; neither trusting to their own choice, nor making choice of that which they may dare to trust. They will set a good face upon their secretly unpleasing sins, and had rather be self-condemned than wise and penitent. As for that old seer, it is like Jeroboam knew his skill, but doubted of his sincerity; that man was too much his neighbour to be good, Abijah's truth had been tried in a case of his own. He, whose word was found just in the prediction of his kingdom, was well worthy of credit in the news of his son. Experience is a great encouragement of our trust. It is a good matter to be faithful; this loadstone of our fidelity shall draw to us even hearts of iron, and hold them to our reliance; as, contrarily, deceit doth both argue and make a bankrupt. Who can trust where he is disappointed? O God, so oft, so ever have we found thee true in all thy promises, in all thy performances, that, if we do not seek thee, if we do not trust thee in the sequel, we are worthy of our loss, worthy of thy desertions.

Yet I do not see that Jeroboam sends to the prophet for his aid, but for intelligence. Curiosity is guilty of this message, and not devotion; he calls not for the prayers, nor for the benediction of that holy man, but for mere information of the event. He well saw what the prayers of a prophet could do: that which cured his hand, might it not have cured his son? yet he that said to a man of God, "Entreat the face of the Lord thy God, that he may restore my hand," says not now, in his message to Abijah, Entreat thy God to restore my son. Sin makes such a strangeness betwixt God and man, that the guilty heart either thinks not of suing to God, or fears it. What a poor contentment it was to foreknow that evil which he could not avoid, and whose notice could but hasten his misery! Yet thus fond is our restless curiosity, that it seeks ease in the drawing on of torment: he is worthy of sorrow that will not stay till it comes to him, but goes to fetch it.

Whom doth Jeroboam send on this message but his wife, and how, but disguised? why her, and why thus? Neither durst he trust his errand with another, nor with her in her own form: it was a secret that Jeroboam sends to a prophet of God; none might know it but his own bosom, and she that lay in it; if this had been noised in Israel, the example had been dangerous: who would not have said, The king is glad to leave his counterfeit deities, and seek to the true? why should we adhere to them whom he forsakes? As the message must not be known to the people, so she that bears it must not be known to the prophet: her name, her habit must be changed; she must put off her robes, and put on a russet coat; she must put off the queen, and put on the peasant; instead of a sceptre, she must take up a basket, and go a masked pilgrimage to Shiloh. O the fondness of vain men, that think to juggle with the Almighty, and to hide their counsels from that all-seeing eye! If this change of habit were necessary at Bethel, yet what needs it at Shiloh? though she should hide her face from her subjects, yet why should she not pull off her muffler, and show herself to the prophet? Certainly, what policy began, guiltiness must continue. Well might she think, there can be no good answer expected of the wife of Jeroboam; my presence will do no less than solicit a reproof. No prophet can speak well to the consort of a founder of idolatry; I may perhaps hear good as another, though, as for myself, I can look for nothing but tidings of evil. Wicked hearts know they deserve ill at God's hands, and therefore they do all they can to avoid the eyes of his displeased justice, and if they cannot do it by colours of dissimulation, they will do it by imploration of *shelter*; they shall say to the rocks, "Fall on us, and cover us."

But, O the gross folly mixt with the craft of wickedness! Could Jeroboam think that the prophet could know the event of his son's disease, and did he think he could not know the disguise of his wife? the one was present, the other future; this was but wrapt in a clout, that event was wrapt in the counsel of God; yet this politic head presumes that the greater shall be revealed, where the lesser shall be hid. There was never a wicked man that was not infatuate, and in nothing more than in those things wherein he hoped most to transcend the reach of others.

Abijah, shunning the iniquity of the times, was retired to a solitary corner of Shiloh; no place could be too private for an honest prophet, in so extreme depravedness; yet even there doth the king of Israel take notice of his reclusion, and sends his wife to that poor cell laden with presents, presents that dissembled their bearer: had she offered jewels, or gold, her greatness had been suspected; now she brings loaves, and cracknels, and honey; her hand answers her back; she gives as she seems, not as she is. Something she must give, even when she acts the poorest client.

The prophets of God were not wont to have empty visitations; they who hated bribes, yet refused not tokens of gratitude. Yea, the God of heaven, who neither needs our goods, nor is capable of our gratifications, yet would have no man to come to him giftless. Woe to those sacrilegious hands, that instead of bringing to the prophets, carry from them.

Jeroboam was a bad man, yet, as he had a towardly son, so he had an obedient wife, else she had not wanted excuses to turn off both the journey and the disguise; against the disguise, she had pleaded the unbeseemingness of her person and state; against the journey, the perils of so long and solitary a walk. Perhaps a lion might be in the way, the lion that tore the prophet in pieces; perhaps robbers; or, if not they, perhaps her chastity might be in danger: an unguarded solitariness in the weaker sex might be a provocation to some forced uncleanness. She casts off all these shifting projections of fear; according to the will of her husband she changes her raiment, she sets upon the journey, and overcomes it. What needed this disguise to an old prophet, whose dim eyes were set with age? all clothes, all faces were alike to a blind seer. The visions of Abijah were inward, neither was his bodily sight more dusky, than the eyes of his mind were clear and piercing. It was not the common light of men whereby he saw, but divine illumination; things absent, things future were no less obvious to those spiritual beams, than present things are to us. Ere the quick eyes of that great lady can discern him, he hath espied her; and, so soon as he hears the sound of her feet, she hears from him the sound of her name, "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam." How God laughs in heaven at the frivolous fetches of crafty politicians, and, when they think themselves most sure, shames them with a detection, with a defeat! What an idleness it is for foolish hypocrites to hope they can dance in a net, unseen of heaven!

Never before was this queen troubled to hear of herself, now she is; her very name struck her with astonishment, and prepares her for the assured horror of following judgments, "I am sent to thee with heavy tidings; go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel." Could this lady less wonder at the mercy of this style of God, than tremble at the sequel of his justice? Lo, Israel hath forsaken God, yet God still owns Israel. Israel hath gone a-whoring, yet God hath not divorced her. O the infinite goodness of our long-suffering God, whom our foulest sins cannot rob of his compassions!

By how much dearer Israel was to God, so much more odious is Jeroboam that hath marred Israel. Terrible is that vengeance which God thunders against him by his prophet, whose passionate message upbraids him with his promotions, chargeth him with his sins, and lastly, denounceth his judgments. No mouth was fitter to cast this royalty in the teeth of Jeroboam, than that by which it was foretold, forepromised: every circumstance of the advancement aggravates the sin, "I exalted thee;" thou couldst not rise to honour alone. "I exalted thee from among the people," not from the peers; thy rank was but common before this rise; "I exalted thee from among the people to be a prince;" subordinate height was not enough for thee, no seat would serve thee but a throne; "Yea, to be a prince of my people Israel." No nation was for thee but my chosen one, none but my royal inheritance: neither did I raise thee into a vacant throne; a forlorn and forsaken principality might be thankless; but "I rent the kingdom away from another for thy sake." Yea, from what other but the grandchild of David? Out of his hands did I wrest the sceptre, to give it into thine. O what high favours doth God sometimes cast away upon unworthy subjects! How do his abused bounties double both their sin and judgment!

The sins of this prince were no less eminent than his obligations, therefore his judgments shall be no less eminent than his sins. How bitterly doth God express that, which shall be more bitter in the execution; "Behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone. Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat, and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat." O heavy load that this disguised princess must carry to her husband! But because these evils, though grievous, yet might be remote, therefore, for a present hansel of vengeance, she is dismissed with the sad tidings of the death of her son; "When thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die." It is heavy news for a mother, that she must lose her son, but worse yet, that she may not see him. In these cases of our final departures, our presence gives some mitigation to our grief. Might she but have closed the eyes, and have received the last breath of her dying son, the loss had been more tolerable: I know not how our personal farewell eases our heart, even while it increases our passion; but now she shall no more see, nor be seen of her Abijah. She shall no sooner be in the city, than he shall be out of the world. Yet more, to perfect her sorrow, she hears, that in him alone there is found some good, the rest of her issue are graceless; she must lose the good, and hold the graceless; he shall die to afflict her, they shall live to afflict her.

Yet what a mixture is here of severity and favour in one act! favour to the son, severity to the father; severity to the father, that he must lose such a son; favour to the son, that he shall be taken from such a father. Jeroboam is wicked, and therefore he shall not enjoy an Abijah; Abijah hath some good things, therefore he shall be removed from the danger of the depravation of Jeroboam. Sometimes God strikes in favour, but more often forbears out of severity. The best are fittest for heaven, the earth is fittest for the worst; this is the region of sin and misery, that of immortality. It is no argument of disfavour to be taken early from a well-led life, as not of approbation to age in sin.

As the soul of Abijah is favoured in the removal, so is his body in a burial; he shall have alone both tears and tomb, all the rest of his brethren shall have no grave but dogs and fowls, no sorrow but for their life. Though the carcass be insensible of any position, yet honest sepulture is a blessing. It is fit the body should be duly respected on earth, whose soul is glorious in heaven.

CONTEMPLATION V.—OF ASA.

THE two houses of Judah and Israel grow up now together in an ambitious rivalry: this splitted plant branches out so severally, as if it had forgotten that ever it was joined in the root. The throne of David oft changeth the possessors, and more complaineth of their iniquity than their remove. Abijam inherits the sins of his father Rehoboam, no less than his crown; and so spends his three years, as if he had been no whit of kin to his grandfather's virtues. It is no news that grace is not traduced, while vice is; therefore is his reign short, because it was wicked. It was a sad case, when both kings of Judah and Israel, though enemies, yet conspired in sin. Rehoboam, like his father Solomon, began graciously, but fell to idolatry; as he followed his father, so his son, so his people followed him. O what a face of a church was here, when Israel worshipped Jeroboam's calves, when Judah built them high places, and images ,and groves on every high hill, and under every green tree! On both hands God is forsaken, his temple neglected, his worship adulterate: and this not for some short brunt, but during the succession of two kings: for, after the first three years, Rehoboam changed his father's religion, as his shields, from gold to brass; the rest of his seventeen years were led in impiety. His son Abijam trode in the same miry steps, and Judah with them both. If there were any (and doubtless there were some) faithful hearts yet remaining in both kingdoms during these heavy times, what a corrosive it must needs have been to them, to see so deplored and miserable a depravation!

There was no visible church upon earth but here; and this, what a one! O God, how low dost thou sometimes suffer thine own flock to be driven! what woeful wanes and eclipses hast thou ordained for this heavenly body! Yet, at last, an Asa shall rise from the loins, from the grave of Abijam, he shall revive David and reform Judah. The gloomy times of corruption shall not last always: the light of truth and peace shall at length break out, and bless the sad hearts of the righteous.

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It is a wonder how Asa should be good, of the seed of Abijam, of the soil of Maachah, both wicked, both idolatrous. God would have us see that grace is from heaven, neither needs the help of these earthly conveyances. Should not the children of good parents sometimes be evil, and the children of evil parents good, virtue would seem natural, and the giver would lose his thanks. Thus we have seen a fair flower spring out of dung, and a well-fruited tree rise out of a sour stock: education hath no less power to corrupt, than nature. It is therefore the just praise of Asa, that, being trained up under an idolatrous Maachah, he maintained his piety; as, contrarily, it is a shame for those, that have been bred up in the precepts and examples of virtue and godliness, to fall off to lewdness or superstition. There are four principal monuments of Asa's virtue, as so many rich stones in his diadem; he took away sodomy and idols out of Judah. Who cannot wonder more that he found them there, than that he removed them? What a strange incongruity is this, Sodom in Jerusalem! idols in Judah! Surely debauched profession proves desperate; admit the idols, ye cannot doubt of the sodomy. If they have changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things, it is no marvel if God give them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves. If they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever, no marvel if God give them to vile affections, to change the natural use into that which is against nature, burning in lust one towards another, men with men, working that which is unseemly.

Contrarily, admit the sodomy, ye cannot doubt of the idols; unnatural beastliness in manners is punished justly with a sottish dotage in religion, bodily pollution with spiritual. How should the soul care to be chaste, that keeps a stew in the body! Asa begins with the banishment of both, scouring Judah of this double uncleanness. In vain should he have hoped to restore God to his kingdom, while these abominations inhabited it. It is justly the main care of worthy and religious princes to clear their coasts of the foulest sins. O the impartial zeal of Asa! There were idols that challenged a prerogative of favour, the idols that his father had made; all these he defaces: the name of a father cannot protect an idol; the duty to his parent cannot win him to a liking, to a forbearance of his misdevotion; yea, so much the more doth the heart of Asa rise against these puppets, for that they were the sin, the shame of his father. Did there want, think we, some courtier of his father's retinue, to say, Sir, favour the memory of him that begot you; you cannot demolish these statues, without the dishonour of their erector; hide your dislike at the least; it will be your glory to lay your finger upon this blot of your father's reputation; if you list not to allow his act, yet wink at it. The godly zeal of Asa turns the deaf ear to these monitors, and lets them see, that he doth not more honour a father, than hate an idol: no dearness of person should take off the edge of our detestation of the sin. Nature is worthy of forgetfulness and contempt, in opposition to the God of nature; upon the same ground as he removed the idols of his father Abijam, so for idols he removed his grandmother Maachah; she would not be removed from her obscene idols, she is therefore removed from the station of her honour. That princess had aged, both in her regency and superstition; under her rod was Asa brought up, and schooled in the rudiments of her idolatry; whom she could not infect, she hoped to overawe; so, as if Asa will not follow her gods, yet she presumes that she may retain her own. Doubtless no means were neglected for her reclamation; none would prevail. Religious Asa gathers up himself, and begins to remember that he is a king, though a son; that she, though a mother, yet is a subject; that her eminence could not but countenance idolatry: that her greatness suppressed religion, which he should in vain hope to reform while her superstition swayed: forgetting therefore the challenges of nature, the awe of infancy, the custom of reverence, he strips her of that command which he saw prejudicial to his Maker. All respects of flesh and blood must be trampled on for God. Could that long settled idolatry want abettors? Questionless some or other would say, This was the religion of your father Abijam, this of your grandfather Rehoboam, this of the latter days of your wise and great grandfather Solomon, this of your grandmother Maachah, this of your great grandmother Naamah; why should it not be yours? why should you suspect either the wisdom, or piety, or salvation of so many predecessors? Good Asa had learned to contemn prescription against a direct law; he had the grace to know it was no measuring truth by so modern antiquity: his eyes scorning to look so low, raise up themselves to the uncorrupt times of Solomon, to David, to Samuel, to the Judges, to Joshua, to Moses, to the patriarchs, to Noah, to the religious founders of the first world, to the first father of mankind, to paradise, to heaven. In comparison of these Maachah's god cannot overlook yesterday: the ancientest error is but a novice to truth; and if never any example could be pleaded for purity of religion, it is enough that the precept is express. He knew what God said in Sinai, and wrote in the tables, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor any similitude;

thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them." If all the world had been an idolater, ever since that word was given, he knew how little that precedent could avail for disobedience. Practice must be corrected by law, and not the law yield to practice: Maachah therefore goes down from her seat, her idols from their grove; she to retiredness, they to the fire, and from thence to the water: woeful deities, that could both burn and drown!

Neither doth the zeal of Asa more magnify itself in these private weedings out of the corruptions of religion, than in the positive acts of a holy plantation. In the falling down of those idolatrous shrines, the temple of God flourishes; that doth he furnish with those sacred treasures, which were dedicated by himself, by his progenitors; like the true son of David, he would not serve God cost free: Rehoboam turned Solomon's gold into brass; Asa turns Rehoboam's brass into gold. Some of these vessels, it seems, Abijam, Asa's father, had dedicated to God; but, after his vow, inquired, yea, withheld them. Asa, like a good son, pays his father's debts, and his own. It is a good sign of a well-meant devotion, when we can abide it chargeable; as, contrarily, in the affairs of God a niggardly hand argues a cold and hollow heart.

All these were noble and excellent acts, the extirpation of sodomy, the demolition of idols, the removal of Maachah, the bounteous contribution to the temple; but that which gives true life unto all these, is a sound root. "Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days." No less laudable works than these have proceeded from hypocrisy, which, while they have carried away applause from men, have lost their thanks with God. All Asa's gold was but dross to his pure intentions.

But, O what great and many infirmities may consist with uprightness! What alloys of imperfection will there be found in the most refined soul! Four no small faults are found in true-hearted Asa; first, the high places stood still, unremoved; what high places? There were some dedicated to the worship of false gods, these Asa took away; there were some misdevoted to the worship of the true God, these he lets stand. There was gross idolatry in the former, there was a weak will-worship in the latter; while he opposes impiety, he winks at mistakings: yet even the variety of altars was forbidden by an express charge from God, who had confined his service to the temple. With one breath doth God report both these; "The high places were not removed, yet nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect." God will not see weaknesses where he sees truth; how pleasing a thing is sincerity, that, in favour thereof, the mercy of our just God digests many an error! O God, let our hearts go upright, though our feet slide; the fall cannot, through thy grace, be deadly, however it may shame or pain us.

Besides, to confront his rival of Israel, Baasha, this religious king of Judah fetches in Benhadad, the king of Syria, into God's inheritance, upon too dear a rate; the breach of his league, the expilation of the temple. All the wealth, wherewith Asa had endowed the house of the Lord, was little enough to hire an Edomite to betray his fidelity, and to invade Israel: leagues may be made with infidels; not at such a price, upon such terms; there can be no warrant for a wilful subordination of perfidiousness: in these cases of outward things, the mercy of God dispenseth with our true necessities, not with the affected. O Asa, where was thy piety, while thou robbest God, to corrupt an infidel, for the slaughter of Israelites! O princes, where is your piety, while ye hire Turks to the slaughter of Christians, to the spoil of God's church!

Yet, which was worse, Asa doth not only employ the Syrian, but relies on him, relies not on God; a confidence less sinful cost his grandfather David dear; and when Hanani, God's seer, the herald of heaven, came to denounce war against him for these sins, Asa, instead of penitence, breaks into choler: fury sparkles in those eyes which should have gushed out with water; those lips that should have called for mercy, command revenge: how ill do those two agree, the heart of David, the tongue of Jeroboam! That holy grandfather of his would not have done so; when God's messenger reproved him for sin, he condemned it, and himself for it; I see his tears, I do not hear his threats. It ill becomes a faithful heart to rage where it should sorrow, and, instead of submission, to persecute. Sometimes no difference appears betwixt a son of David and the son of Nebat. Any man may do ill; but to defend it, to outface it, is for rebels; yet even upright Asa imprisons the prophet, and crusheth his gainsayers. It were pity that the best man should be judged by every of his actions, and not by all; the course of our life must either allow or condemn us, not these sudden eruptions.

As the life, so the death-bed of Asa wanted not infirmities: long and prosperous had his reign been; now, after forty years' health and happiness, he, that imprisoned the prophet, is imprisoned in his bed. There is more pain in those fetters which God put upon Asa, than those which Asa puts upon Hanani: and now, behold, he that in his war seeks to Benhadad, not to God, in his sickness seeks not to God, but to physicians. We cannot easily put upon God a greater wrong than the alienation of our trust. Earthly means are for use, not for confidence; we may, we must employ them, as his peculiar, trust, which, if we cast upon any creature, we deify it. Whence have herbs, and drugs, and physicians, their being and efficacy, but from that divine hand? No marvel then if Asa's gout struck to his heart, and his feet carried him to his grave, since his heart was miscarried, for the cure of his feet, to an injurious misconfidence in the means, with neglect of his Maker.

CONTEMPLATION VI.—ELIJAH WITH THE SAREPTAN.

Who should be matched with Moses in the hill of Tabor but Elijah? Surely, next after Moses, there was never any prophet of the Old Testament more glorious than he; none more glorious, none more obscure: the other prophets are not mentioned without the name of their parent, for the mutual honour both of the father and the son; Elijah, as if he had been a son of the earth, comes forth with the bare mention of the place of his birth. Meanness of descent is no block in God's way to the most honourable vocations; it matters not whose son he be, whom God will grace with his service. In the greatest honours that human nature is capable of, God forgets our parents: as when we shall be raised up to a glorious life, there shall be no respect had to the loins whence we came; so it is proportionally in these spiritual advancements.

These times were fit for an Elijah; an Elijah was fit for them: the eminentest prophet is reserved for the corruptest age. Israel had never such a king as Ahab for impiety, never so miraculous a prophet as Elijah; this Elijah is addressed to this Ahab. The God of spirits knows how to proportion men to the occasions, and to raise up to himself such witnesses, as may be most able to convince the world. A mild Moses was for the low estate of afflicted Israel; mild in spirit, but mighty in wonders; mild of spirit, because he had to do with a persecuted, and yet a touchy and perverse people; mighty in wonders, because he had to do with a Pharaoh. A grave and holy Samuel was for the quiet consistence of Israel; a fiery spirited Elijah was for the desperatest declination of Israel. And if, in the late times of the depraved condition of his church, God have raised up some spirits, that have been more warm and stirring than those of common mould, we cannot censure the choice, when we see the service.

The first word that we hear from Elijah is an oath, and a threat to Ahab, to Israel: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain, these years, but according to my word." He comes in like a tempest, who went out in a whirlwind; doubtless he had spoken fair and peaceable invitations to Israel, though we hear them not; this was but the storm which followed his repulse, their obstinacy. After many solicitations and warnings, Israel is stricken by the same tongue that had prayed for it; Elijah dares avouch these judgments to their head, to Ahab. I do not so much wonder at the boldness of Elijah, as at his power; yea, whoso sees his power, can no whit wonder at his boldness: how could he but be bold to the face of a man, who was thus powerful with God? As if God had lent him the keys of heaven to shut it up, and open it at pleasure, he can say, "There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." O God, how far it hath pleased thee to communicate thyself to a weak man! what angel could ever say thus? Thy hand, O Lord, is not shortened; why art thou not thus marvellous in the ministers of thy gospel? is it for that their miracles were ours? is it for that thou wouldst have us live by faith, not by sense? is it for that our task is spiritual, and therefore more abstracted from bodily helps? We cannot command the sun with Joshua, nor the thunder with Samuel, nor the rain with Elijah; it shall content us, if we can fix the Sun of Righteousness in the soul, if we can thunder out the judgments of God against sin, if we can water the earthen hearts of men with the former and latter rain of heavenly doctrine.

Elijah's mantle cannot make him forget his flesh; while he knows himself a prophet, he remembers to be a man; he doth not therefore arrogate his power, as his own, but publisheth it as his master's; this restraint must be according to his word, and that word was from a higher mouth than his. He spake from him by whom he sware, whose word was as sure as his life; and therefore he durst say, "As the Lord liveth, there shall be no rain." Man only can denounce what God will execute, which, when it is once revealed, can no more fail than the Almighty himself.

He that had this interest and power in heaven, what needed he fly from an earthly pursuit? could his prayers restrain the clouds, and hold the hands of flesh and blood? yet, behold, Elijah must fly from Ahab, and hide him by the brook Cherith. The wisdom of God doth not think fit so to make a beaten path of miracles, as that he will not walk beside it: he will have our own endeavours concur to our preservation. Elijah wanted neither courage of heart, nor strength of mind, and yet he must trust to his feet for safety: how much more lawful is it, for our impotence, to fly from persecution? Even that God sends him to hide his head, who could as easily have protected as nourished him. He that wilfully stands still to catch dangers, tempteth God instead of trusting him.

The prophet must be gone, not without order taken for his purveyance: O the strange caterers for Elijah! "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." I know not whether had been more miraculous, to preserve him without meat, or to provide meat by such mouths. The raven, a devouring and ravenous fowl, that uses to snatch away meat from others, brings it to him. He, that could have fed Elijah by angels, will feed him by ravens. There was then in Israel a hospitable Obadiah, that kept a secret table, in two several caves, for a hundred prophets of God. There were seven thousand faithful Israelites, in spite of the devil, who had never bowed knee to Baal: doubtless, any of these would have had a trencher ready for Elijah, and have thought himself happy to have defrauded his own belly for so noble a prophet: God rather chooses to make use of the most unlikely fowls of the air, than their bounty, that he might give both to his prophet, and as a pregnant proof of his absolute command over all his creatures, and win our trust in all extremities. Who can make question of the provisions of God, when he sees the very ravens shall forget their own hunger and purvey for Elijah? O God, thou that providest meat for the fowls of the air, wilt make the fowls of the air provide meat for man, rather than his dependence on thee shall be disappointed! O let not our faith be wanting to thee; thy care can never be wanting to us.

Elijah might have lived for the time with bread and water; neither had his fare been worse than his fellows in the caves of Obadiah; but the munificence of God will have his meals better furnished. The ravens shall bring him both bread and flesh twice in the day. It is not for a persecuted prophet to long after delicates: God gives order for competency, not for wantonness; not out of the dainty compositions in Jezebel's kitchen, not out of the pleasant wines in her cellar, would God provide for Elijah; but the ravens shall bring him plain and homely victuals, and the river shall afford him drink: if we have wherewith to sustain nature, though not to pamper it, we owe thanks to the giver. Those of God's family may not be curious, not disdainful. Ill doth it become a servant of the Highest to be a slave to his palate. Doubtless, one bit from the mouth of the raven was more pleasing to Elijah, than a whole tableful of Ahab's. Nothing is more comfortable to God's children, than to see the sensible demonstrations of the divine care and providence.

The brook Cherith cannot last always; that stream shall not, for Elijah's sake, be exempted from the universal exsiccation: yea, the prophet himself feels the smart of this drought, which he had denounced. It is no unusual thing with God to suffer his own dear children to be inwrapped in the common calamities of offenders. He makes difference in the use and issue of their stripes, not in the infliction. The corn is cut down with the weed, but to a better purpose.

When the brook fails, God hath a Sarepta for Elijah; instead of the ravens, a widow shall there feed him, yea, herself by him. Who can enough wonder at the pitch of this selective providence of the Almighty? Sarepta was a town of Sidon, and therefore without the pale of the church: poverty was the best of this widow, she was a pagan by birth, heathenishly superstitious by institution. Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto this Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. He, that first fed the prophet by the mouth of unclean fowls, will now feed him by the hand of a heathenish hostess; his only command sanctifies those creatures, which, by a general charge, were legally impure.

There were other birds besides ravens, other widows beside this Sareptan; none but the ravens, none but the Sareptan shall nourish Elijah. God's choice is not led in the string of human reasons, his holy will is the guide and the ground of all his elections. "It is not in him that wills, nor in him that runs, but in God that shows mercy."

The prophet follows the call of his God; the same hand that brought him to the gate of Sarepta, led also this poor widow out of her doors; she shall then go to seek her sticks; when she shall be found of Elijah; she thought of her hearth, she thought not of a prophet, when the man of God calls to her, "Fetch me a little water, I pray thee, in a vessel, that I may drink." It was no easy suit in so droughty a season; and yet at the first sight, the prophet dares second it with a greater, "Bring me a morsel of bread in thine hand." That long drought had made every drop, every crumb precious; yet the prophet is emboldened by the charge of God to call for both water and bread; he had found the ravens so officious, that he cannot make doubt of the Sareptan. She sticks not at the water; she would not stick at the bread if necessity had not pressed her. "As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruise; and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat and die."

If she knew not the man, how did she know his God? and if she knew not the God of Elijah, how did she swear by him? Certainly, though she were without the bounds of Israel, yet she was within the borders; so much she had gained by her neighbourhood to know an Israelite, a prophet by his habit: to know the only living God was the God of the prophet, the God of Israel; and if this had not been, yet it is no marvel if the widow knew Elijah, since the ravens knew him. It was high time for the prophet to visit the Sareptan; poor soul, she was now making her last meal; after one mean morsel she was yielding herself over to death. How opportunely hath God provided succours to our distresses! It is his glory to help at a pinch, to begin where we have given over; that our relief might be so much the more welcome, by how much it is less looked for.

But, O what a trial is this of the faith of a weak proselyte, if she were so much! "Fear not, go, do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it to me; and after, make for thee and thy son: for thus saith the God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, nor the cruise of oil fail, till the day that God send rain upon the earth." She must go spend upon a stranger part of that little she hath, in hope of more which she hath not, which she may have; she must part with her present food which she saw, in trust of future which she could not see; she must rob her sense in the exercise of her belief, and shorten her life in being, upon the hope of a protraction of it in promise; she must believe God will miraculously increase what she hath yielded to consume; she must first feed the stranger with her last victuals, and then, after, herself and her son. Some sharp dame would have taken up the prophet, and have sent him away with an angry repulse: *Bold* Israelite, there is no reason in this request; wert thou a friend or a brother, with what face couldst thou require to pull my last bite out of my mouth? had I superfluity of provision, thou mightest hope for this effect of my charity; now, that I have but one morsel for myself and my son, this is an injurious importunity; what can induce thee to think thy life, an unknown traveller, should be more dear to me than my son's, than my own? how uncivil is this motion, that I should first make provision for thee in this dying extremity: it had been too much to have begged my last scraps. Thou tellest me, the meal shall not waste, nor the oil fail; how shall I believe thee? let me see that done before thou eatest; in vain should I challenge thee, when the remainder of my poor store is consumed. If thou canst so easily multiply victuals, how is it that thou wantest? Do that before-hand, which thou promisest shall be afterwards performed, there will be no need of my little. But this good Sareptan was wrought on by God not to mistrust a prophet; she will do what he bids, and hope for what he promises; she will live by faith rather than by sense, and give away the present, in the confidence of a future remuneration: first she bakes Elijah's cake, then her own, not grudging to see her last morsels go down another's throat, while herself was famishing. How hard precepts doth God lay, where he intends bounty! Had not God meant her preservation, he had suffered her to eat her last cake alone, without any interpellation; now the mercy of the Almighty purposing as well this miraculous favour to her, as to his prophet, requires of her this task, which flesh and blood would have thought unreasonable. So we are wont to put hard questions to those scholars, whom we would promote to higher forms. So in all achievements, the difficulty of the enterprise makes way for the glory of the actor.

Happy was it for this widow, that she did not shut her hand to the man of God, that she was no niggard of her last handful: never corn or oil did so increase in growing, as here in consuming. This barrel, this cruise of hers had no bottom, the barrel of meal wasted not, the cruise of oil failed not: behold, not getting, not saving, is the way to abundance, but giving. The mercy of God crowns our beneficence with the blessing of store; who can fear want by a merciful liberality, when he sees the Sareptan had famished, if she had not given, and by giving, abounded? With what thankful devotion must this woman every day needs look upon her barrel and cruise, wherein she saw the mercy of God renewed to her continually? Doubtless her soul was no less fed by faith, than her body with this supernatural provision. How welcome a guest must Elijah needs be to this widow, that gave her life and her son's to her for this board! yea that, in that woeful famine, gave her and her son their board for his house-room.

The dearth thus overcome, the mother looks hopefully upon her only son, promising herself much joy in his life and prosperity, when an unexpected sickness surpriseth him, and doth that which the famine but threatened. When can we hold ourselves secure from evils? no sooner is one of these sergeants compounded withal, than we are arrested by another.

How ready are we to mistake the grounds of our afflictions, and to cast them upon false causes. The passionate mother cannot find whether to impute the death of her son, but to the presence of Elijah, to whom she comes distracted with perplexity, not without an unkind challenge of him, from whom she had received both that life she had lost, and that she had: "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come to me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

As if her son could not have died, if Elijah had not been her guest; whereas her son had died, but for him. Why should she think that the prophet had saved him from the famine, to kill him with sickness? as if God had not been free in his actions, and must needs strike by the same hands by which he preserved. She had the grace to know that her affliction was for her sin; yet was so unwise to imagine the arrearages of her inquities had not been called for, if Elijah had not been the remembrancer; he, who had appeased God towards her, is suspected to have incensed him: this wrongful misconstruction was enough to move any patience. Elijah was of a hot spirit; yet his holiness kept him from fury: this challenge rather increased the zeal of his prayer, than stirred his choler to the offendent. He takes the dead child out of his mother's bosom, and lays him upon his own bed, and cries unto the Lord, "O Lord my God, hast thou brought evil also upon the widow, with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" Instead of chiding the Sareptan, out of the fervency of his soul, he humbly expostulates with his God: his only remedy is in his prayer; that which shut heaven for rain, must open it for life. Every word enforceth; first, he pleads his interest in God, "O Lord my God:" then the quality of the patient, "a widow," and therefore both most distressed with the loss, and most peculiar to the charge of the Almighty. Then his interest, as in God, so in this patient, "with whom I sojourn;" as if the stroke were given to himself, through her sides; and lastly, the quality of the punishment, "by slaying her son," the only comfort of her life: and in all these, implying the scandal that must needs arise from this event, wherever it should be noised, to the name of his God, to his own; when it should be said, Lo! how Elijah's entertainment is rewarded: surely the prophet is either impotent, or unthankful.

Neither doth his tongue move thus only; thrice doth he stretch himself upon the dead body, as if he could wish to infuse of his own life into the child, and so often calls to his God for the restitution of that soul. What can Elijah ask to be denied? the Lord heard the voice of the prophet, the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. What miracle is impossible to faithful prayers? There cannot be more difference betwixt Elijah's devotion and ours, than betwixt supernatural and ordinary acts; if he therefore obtained miraculous favours by his prayers, do we doubt of those which are within the sphere of nature and use? What could we want, if we did not slack to ply heaven with our prayers?

Certainly Elijah had not been premonished of this sudden sickness and death of the child; he, who knew the remote affairs of the world, might not know what God would do within his own roof. The greatest prophet must content himself with so much of God's counsel, as he will please to reveal; and he will sometimes reveal the greater secrets, and conceal the less, to make good both his own liberty, and man's *humiliation*. So much more unexpected as the stroke was, so much more welcome is the cure. How joyfully doth the man of God take the revived child into his arms, and present him to his mother! How doth his heart leap within him, at this proof of God's favour to him, mercy to the widow, power to the child.

What life and joy did now show itself in the face of that amazed mother, when she saw again the eyes of her son fixed upon her's; when she felt his flesh warm, his motions vital! Now she can say to Elijah, "By this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." Did she not till now know this? had she not said before, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?" Were not her cruise and her barrel sufficient proofs of his divine commission? Doubtless, what her meal and oil had assured her of, the death of her son made her to doubt; and now the reviving did re-ascertain. Even the strongest faith sometimes staggereth, and needeth new acts of heavenly supportation; the end of miracles is confirmation of truth. It seems, had this widow's son continued dead, her belief had been buried in his grave: notwithstanding her meal and her oil, her soul had languished. The mercy of God is fain to provide new helps for our infirmities, and graciously condescends to our own terms, that he may work out our faith and salvation.

CONTEMPLATION VII.—ELIJAH WITH THE BAALITES.

THREE years and a half did Israel lie gasping under a parching drought and miserable famine. No creature was so odious to them as Elijah, to whom they ascribed all their misery. Methinks I hear how they railed on, and cursed the prophet: how much envy must the servants of God undergo for their master! nothing but the tongue was Elijah's, the hand was God's; the prophet did but say what God would do. I do not see them fall out with their sins, that had deserved the judgment, but with the messenger that denounced it. Baal had no fewer servants, than if there had been both rain and plenty. Elijah safely spends this storm under the lee of Sarepta; some three years had he lain close in that obscure corner, and lived upon the barrel and cruise which he had multiplied: at last God calls him forth, "Go, shew thyself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth;" no rain must fall till Elijah was seen of Ahab; he carried away the clouds with him, he must bring them again. The king, the people of Israel, shall be witnesses that God will make good the word, the oath of his prophet. Should the rain have fallen in Elijah's absence, who could have known it was by his procurement? God holds the credit of his messengers precious, and neglects nothing that may grace them in the eyes of the world; not the necessity of seven thousand religious Israelites could crack the word of one Elijah. There is nothing wherein God is more tender, than in approving the veracity of himself in his ministers.

Lewd Ahab hath a holy steward; as his name was, so was he a servant of God, while his master was a slave to Baal. He, that reserved seven thousand in the kingdom of Israel, hath reserved an Obadiah in the court of Israel, and by him hath reserved them. Neither is it likely there had been so many free hearts in the country, if religion had not been secretly backed in the court: it is a great happiness when God gives favour and honour to the virtuous. Elijah did not lie more close in Sarepta, than Obadiah did in the court; he could not have done so much service to the church, if he had not been as secret as good. Policy and religion do as well together, as they do ill asunder. The dove, without the serpent is easily caught; the serpent, without the dove, stings deadly. Religion without policy, is too simple to be safe; policy, without religion, is too subtile to be good: their match makes themselves secure, and many happy.

O degenerated estate of Israel! any thing was now lawful there saving piety. It is well if God's prophets can find an hole to hide their heads in; they must needs be hard driven, when fifty of them are fain to crowd together into one cave: there they had both shade and repast. Good Obadiah hazards his own life to preserve theirs, and spends himself in that extreme dearth, upon their necessary diet: bread and water was more now, than other whiles wine and delicates. Whether shall we wonder more at the mercy of God in reserving a hundred prophets, or in thus sustaining them, being reserved? When did God ever leave his Israel unfurnished of some prophets? when did he leave his prophets unprovided of some Obadiah? How worthy art thou, O Lord, to be trusted with thine own charge! While there are men upon earth, or birds in the air, or angels in heaven, thy messengers cannot want provision.

Goodness carries away trust, where it cannot have imitation. Ahab divides with Obadiah the survey of the whole land; they two set their own eyes on work, for the search of water, of pasture, to preserve the horses and mules alive. O the poor and vain cares of Ahab! he casts to kill the prophet, to save the cattle; he never seeks to save his own soul, to destroy idolatry; he takes thought for grass, none for mercy. Carnal hearts are ever either grovelling on the earth, or delving into it; no more regarding God or their souls, than if they either were not, or were worthless.

Elijah hears of the progress, and offers himself to the view of them both. Here was wisdom in this courage; first, he presents himself to Obadiah, ere he will be seen of Ahab, that Ahab might, upon the report of so discreet an informer, digest the expectation of his meeting; then he takes the opportunity of Ahab's presence, when he might be sure Jezebel was away.

Obadiah meets the prophet, knows him, and, as if he had seen God in him, falls on his face to him, whom he knew his master persecuted: though a great peer, he had learned to honour a prophet. No respect was too much for the president of that sacred college. To the poor boarder of the Sareptan, here was no less than a prostration, and my lord Elijah, from the great high steward of Israel. Those that are truly gracious cannot be niggardly of their observances to the messengers of God.

Elijah receives the reverence, returns a charge; "Go, tell thy lord, Behold Elijah is here." Obadiah finds this load too heavy; neither is he more stricken with the boldness than with the unkindness of this command; boldness in respect of Elijah, unkindness in respect of himself: for thus he thinks, If Elijah do come to Ahab, he dies; if he do not come, I die: if it be known that I met him, and brought him not, it is death; if I say that he will come voluntarily, and God shall alter his intentions, it is death. How unhappy a man am I, that must be either Elijah's executioner, or my own! Were Ahab's displeasure but smoking, I might hope to quench it; but now that the flame of it hath broken forth to the notice, to the search of all the kingdoms and nations round about, it may consume me, I cannot extinguish it; this message was for an enemy of Elijah, for a client of Baal. As for me, I have well approved my true devotion to God, my love to his prophets: what have I done, that I should be singled out either to kill Elijah, or to be killed for him? Many a hard plunge must that man needs be driven to, who would hold his conscience together with the service and favour of a tyrant. It is a happy thing to serve a just master; there is no danger, no stain in such obedience.

But, when the prophet binds his resolution with an oath, and clears the heart of Obadiah from all fears, from all suspicions, the good man dares be the messenger of that which he saw was decreed in heaven. Doubtless Ahab startled to hear of Elijah coming to meet him, as one that did not more hate, than fear the prophet. Well might he think, Thus long, thus far have I sought Elijah, Elijah would not come to seek me, but under a sure guard, and with some strange commission; his coarse mantle hath the advantage of my robe and sceptre; if I can command a piece of the earth, I see he can command heaven. The edge of his revenge is taken off with a doubtful expectation of the issue; and now, when Elijah offers himself to the eyes of Ahab, he, who durst not strike, yet durst challenge the prophet, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Jeroboam's hand was still in Ahab's thoughts; he holds it not so safe to smite, as to expostulate. He, that was the head of Israel, speaks out that which was in the heart of all his people, that Elijah was the cause of all their sorrow. Alas, what hath the righteous prophet done! he taxed their sin, he foretold the judgment, he deserved it not, he inflicted it not: yet he smarts, and they are guilty: as if some fond people should accuse the herald or the trumpet as the cause of their war; or, as if some ignorant peasant, when he sees his fowls bathing in his pond, should cry out of them as the causes of foul weather.

O the heroical spirit of Elijah! he stands alone amidst all the train of Ahab, and dares not only repel this charge, but retort it: "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." No earthly glory can daunt him, who hath the clear and heartening visions of God; this holy seer discerns the true cause of our sufferings to be our sins; foolish men are plagued for their offences; and it is no small part of their plague that they see it not. The only common disturber of men, families, cities, kingdoms, worlds, is sin; there is no such traitor to any state, as the wilfully wicked: the quietest and most plausible offender is secretly seditious, and stirreth quarrels in heaven.

The true messengers of God carry authority even where they are maligned; Elijah doth at once reprove the king, and require of him the improvement of his power, in gathering all Israel to Carmel, in fetching thither all the prophets of Baal. Baal was rich in Israel, while God was poor; while God hath but one hundred prophets hid closely in Obadiah's caves, Baal hath eight hundred and fifty; four hundred and fifty dispersed over the villages and towns of Israel, four hundred at the court. God's prophets are glad of bread and water, while the four hundred trencher-prophets of Jezebel feed on her dainties: they lurk in caves, while these lord it in the pleasantest groves. Outward prosperity is a false note of truth; all these, with all Israel, doth Elijah require Ahab to summon unto Carmel. It is in the power of kings to command the assembly of the prophets; the prophet sues to the prince for the indiction of this synod. They are injurious to sovereignty who arrogate this power to none but spiritual hands. How is it, that Ahab is as ready to perform this charge, as Elijah to move it? I dare answer for his heart, that it was not drawn with love: Was it out of the sense of one judgment, and fear of another? He smarted with the dearth and drought, and well thinks Elijah would not be so round with him for nothing. Was it out of an expectation of some miraculous exploit which the prophet would do in the sight of all Israel? or, was it out of the overruling power of the Almighty? "The heart of kings is in the hands of God, and he turns it which way soever he pleaseth."

Israel is met together, Elijah rates them, not so much for their superstition, as for their unsettledness and irresolution. One Israelite serves God, another Baal; yea, the same Israelite, perhaps serves both God and Baal: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." Nothing is more odious to God than a profane neutrality in main oppositions of religion; to go upright in a wrong way, is a less eye-sore to God, than to halt betwixt right and wrong. The Spirit wished that the Laodicean were either hot or cold; either temper would be better borne than neither, than both: in reconcileable differences, nothing is more safe than indifferency both of practice and opinion; but, in cases of so necessarily hostility as betwixt God and Baal, he that is on neither side is the deadliest enemy to both; less hateful are they to God that serve him not at all, than they that serve him with a rival.

Whether out of guiltiness, or fear, or uncertainty, Israel is silent; yet, while their mouth was shut, their eyes were open. It was a fair motion of Elijah: "I am only remaining a prophet of the Lord, Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty; let them choose one bullock, let me choose another; their devotion shall be combined, mine single; the God that consumes the sacrifice by fire from heaven, let him be God." Israel cannot but approve it; the prophets of Baal cannot refuse it; they had the appearance of the advantage, in their number, in the favour of king and people. O strange disputation, wherein the argument, which must be used, is fire; the place whence it must be fetched, heaven; the mood and figure, devotion; the conclusion, death to be overcome!

Had not Elijah, by divine instinct, been assured of the event, he durst not have put religion upon such hazard; that God commanded him this trial, who meant confusion to the authors of idolatry, victory to the truth. His terror shall be approved both by fire and by water; first by fire, then by water; there was no less terror in the fire, than mercy in the rain: it was fit they should be first humbled by his terrors, that they might be made capable of his mercy; and, by both, might be won to repentance. Thus still the fears of the law make way for the influences of grace; neither do those sweet and heavenly dews descend upon the soul, till way be made for them by the terrible flashes of the law.

Justly doth Elijah urge this trial. God's sacrifices were used to none but heavenly fires; whereas the base and earthly religion of the heathen contented itself with gross and natural flames.

The prophets of Baal durst not, though with faint and guilty hearts, but embrace the condition; they dress their bullock, and lay it ready upon the wood, and send out their cries to Baal from morning until midday; "O Baal, hear us!" What a yelling was here of four hundred and fifty throats tearing the skies for an answer! What leaping was here upon the altar, as if they would have climbed up to fetch that fire which would not come down alone! Mount Carmel might give an echo to their voice, heaven gave none; in vain do they roar out, and weary themselves in imploring a dumb and deaf deity. Grave and austere Elijah holds it not too light to flout their zealous devotion; he laughs at their tears, and plays upon their earnest: "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is travelling, or he is sleeping, and must be awaked."

Scorns and taunts are the best answers for serious idolatry; holiness will bear us out in disdainful scoffs, and bitterness against wilful superstition. No less in the indignation at these insulting frumps, than zeal of their own safety and reputation, do these idolatrous prophets now rend their throats with acclamations, and, that they may assure the beholders they were not in jest, they cut and slash themselves with knives and lancets, and solicit the fire with their blood. How much painfulness is there in misreligion! I do not find that the true God ever required or accepted the self-tortures of his servants; he loves true inward mortification of our corruptions, he loves the subduing of our spiritual insurrections by due exercises of severe restraint; he takes no pleasure in our blood, in our carcasses: they mistake God that think to please him by destroying that nature which he hath made, and measure truth by rigour of outward extremities; Elijah drew no blood of himself, the priests of Baal did. How fain would the devil, whom these idolaters adored, have answered the suit of his suppliants! What would that ambitious spirit have given, that, as he was cast down from heaven like lightning, so now he might have fallen down in that form upon his altar!

God forbids it: all the powers of darkness can no more show one flash of fire in the air, than avoid the unquenchable fire in hell. How easy were it for the power of the Almighty to cut short all the tyrannical usurpations of that wicked one, if his wisdom and justice did not find the permission thereof useful to his holy purposes.

These idolaters, now towards evening, grew so much more vehement, as they were more hopeless; and at last, when neither their shrieks, nor their wounds, nor their mad motions, could prevail, they sit down hoarse and weary, tormenting themselves afresh with their despairs, and with the fears of better success of their adversary; when Elijah calls the people to him, the witnesses of his sincere proceedings, and taking the opportunity, both of the time, just the hour of the evening sacrifice, and of the place, (a ruined altar of God, now by him repaired) convinces Israel with his miracle, and more cuts these Baalites with envy, than they had cut themselves with their lancets.

O holy prophet, why didst thou not save this labour? what needed these unseasonable reparations? was there not an altar, was there not a sacrifice ready prepared to thine hand? that, which the prophets of Baal had addressed, stood still waiting for that fire from thee, which the founders threatened in vain: the stones were not more impure, either for their touch or for their intentions. Yet such was thy detestation of idolatry, that thou abhorredst to meddle with ought which their wickedness had defiled: even that altar, whose ruins thou didst thus repair, was miserected, though to the name of the true God; yet didst thou find it better to make up the breaches of that altar which was misconsecrated to the service of thy God, than to make use of that pile which was idolatrously devoted to a false god. It cannot be but safe to keep aloof from participation with idolaters, even in those things, which, not only in nature, but in use, are unclean.

Elijah lays twelve stones in his repaired altar, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob. Alas! ten of these were perverted to Baal. The prophet regards not their present apostasy, he regards the ancient covenant that was made with their father Israel; he regards their first station, to which he would reduce them: he knew, that the unworthiness of Israel could not make God forgetful: he would, by this monument, put Israel in mind of their own degeneration and forgetfulness. He employs those many hands for the making a large trench round about the altar, and causes it to be filled with those precious remainders of water which the people would have grudged to their own mouths, neither would easily have parted with, but as those that pour down a pailful into a dry pump, in the hope of fetching more. The altar, the trench is full. A barrelful is poured out for each of the tribes, that every tribe might be afterwards replenished. Ahab and Israel are no less full of expectation; and now, when God's appointed hour of the evening sacrifice was come, Elijah comes confidently to his altar, and, looking up into heaven, says, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word; hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back again."

The Baalites' prayers were not more tedious than Elijah's was short, and yet more pithy than short, charging God with the care of his covenant, of his truth, of his glory. It was Elijah that spake loud. O strong cries of faith, that pierce the heavens, and irresistibly make their way to the throne of grace! Israel shall well see, that Elijah's God, whom they have forsaken, is neither talking, nor pursuing, nor travelling, nor sleeping. Instantly the fire of the Lord falls from heaven and consumes the burnt sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and licks up the water that was in the trench. With what terror must Ahab and Israel needs see this fire rolling down out of the sky, and alighting with such fury so near their heads, heads no less fit for this flame, than the sacrifice of Elijah! Well might they have thought, how easily might this fire have dilated itself, and have consumed our bodies, as well as the wood and stone, and have licked up our blood as well as that water! I know not whether they had the grace to acknowledge the mercy of God; they could do no less than confess his power, "The Lord is God, the Lord is God."

The iron was now hot with this heavenly fire; Elijah stays not till it cool again, but strikes immediately: "Take the prophets of Baal, let not one of them escape." This wager was for life: had they prevailed in procuring this fire, and Elijah failed of effect, his head had been forfeited to them: now in the contrary success, theirs are lost to him. Let no man complain that those holy hands were bloody; this sacrifice was no less pleasing to God than that other. Both the man and the act were extraordinary, and led by a peculiar instinct; neither doth the prophet this without the assent of the supreme magistrate, who was now so affected with this miraculous work, that he could not, in the heat of that conviction, but allow the justice of such a sentence. Far be it from us to accuse God's commands or executions of cruelty. It was the ancient and peremptory charge of God, that the authors of idolatry and seduction should die the death; no eye, no hand might spare them. The prophet doth but move the performance of that law, which Israel could not without sin have omitted. It is a merciful and thankworthy severity, to rid the world of the ringleaders of wickedness.

CONTEMPLATION VIII.—ELIJAH RUNNING BEFORE AHAB, FLEEING FROM JEZEBEL.

I HEAR no news of the four hundred prophets of the groves: they lie close under the wing of Jezebel, under their pleasing shades, neither will be suffered to undergo the danger of this trial: the carcasses of their fellows help to fill up the half-dry channel of Kishon. Justice is no sooner done, than Ahab hears news of mercy from Elijah: "Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain." Their meeting was not more harsh than their parting was friendly. It seems Ahab had spent all that day fasting, in an eager attendance of those conflicting prophets. It must needs be late ere the execution could be done: Elijah's part began not till the evening. So far must the king of Israel be from taking thought of the massacre of those four hundred and fifty Baalites, that now "he may go eat his bread with joy, and drink his wine with a cheerful heart;" for God accepteth this work, and testifies it in the noise of much rain. Every drop of that idolatrous blood was answered with a shower of rain, with a stream of water, and plenty poured down in every shower. A sensible blessing follows the impartial strokes of severe justice. Nothing is more cruel than an unjust pity.

No ears but Elijah's could as yet perceive a sound of rain; the clouds were not yet gathered, the vapours were not yet risen, yet Elijah hears that which shall be. Those that are of God's counsel, can discern either favours or judgments afar off. The slack apprehensions of carnal hearts make them hard to believe that as future, which the quick and refined senses of the faithful perceive as present.

Ahab goes up to his repast, Elijah goes up to his prayers. That day had been painful to him, the vehemency of his spirit draws him to a neglect of his body. The holy man climbs up to the top of Carmel, that now he may talk with his God alone; neither is he sooner ascended, than he casts himself down upon the earth. He bows his knees to God, and bows his face down to his knees; by this humble posture, acknowledging his awful respects to that Majesty which he implored. We cannot prostrate our bodies or souls too low to that infinitely glorious Deity, who is the Creator of both.

His thoughts were more high than his body was low: what he said we know not, we know that what he said opened the heavens, that for three years and a half had been shut up. God had said before, "I will send rain upon the earth;" yet Elijah must pray for what God did promise. The promises of the Almighty do not discharge our prayers, but suppose them; he will do what he undertakes, but we must sue for that which we would have him do. Our petitions are included in the decrees, in the engagements of God.

The prophet had newly seen, and caused the fire to descend immediately out of heaven; he doth not look the water should do so; he knew that the rain must come from the clouds, and that the clouds must arise from vapours, and those vapours from the sea, thence doth he expect them: but as not willing that the thoughts of his fixed devotion should be distracted, he doth not go himself, only sends his servant to bring him the news of his success. At the first sight nothing appears; seven times must he walk to that prospect, and not till his last view can discern ought.

All that while is the prophet in his prayers, neither is any whit undaunted with that delay. Hope holds up the head of our holy desires, and perseverance crowns it. If we receive not an answer to our suits at the sixth motion, we may not be out of countenance, but must try the seventh. At last, a little cloud arises out of the sea of a hand-breadth. So many, so fervent prayers cannot but pull water out of heaven as well as fire: those sighs reflect upon the earth, and from the earth reflect upon heaven, from heaven rebound upon the sea, and raise vapours up thence to heaven again. If we find that our prayers are heard for the substance, we may not cavil at the quantity. Even a hand-broad cloud contents Elijah, and fills his heart full of joy and thankfulness. He knew well this meteor was not at the biggest, it was newly born of the womb of the waters, and in some minutes of age must grow to a large stature: stay but awhile, and heaven is covered with it. From how small beginnings have great matters arisen! It is no otherwise in all the gracious proceedings of God with the soul; scarce sensible are those first works of his spirit in the heart, which grow up at last to the wonder of men, and applause of angels.

Well did Elijah know that God, who is perfection itself, would not defile his hand with an imperfect and scanted favour; as one *therefore* that foresaw the face of heaven overspread with this cloudy spot, he sends to Ahab to hasten his chariot, that the rain stop him not. It is long since Ahab feared this let; never was the news of a danger more welcome. Doubtless the king of Israel, while he was at his diet, looked long for Elijah's promised showers; Where is the rain whose sound the prophet heard? how is it that his ears were so much quicker than our eyes? we saw his fire to our terror; how gladly would we see his waters! When now the servant of Elijah brings him news from heaven, that the clouds were setting forward, and if he hastened not, would be before him; the wind arises, the clouds gather, the sky thickens; Ahab betakes him to X his chariot, Elijah girds up his loins, and runs before him. Surely the prophet could not want the offer of more ease in his passage; but he will be for the time Ahab's lackey, that the king and all Israel may see his humility no less than his power, and may confess that the glory of those miracles hath not made him insolent. He knew that his very sight was monitory; neither could Ahab's mind be beside the miraculous works of God, while his eye was upon Elijah; neither could the king's heart be otherwise than well affected towards the prophet, while he saw that himself and all Israel had received a new life by his procurement. But what news was here for Jezebel! Certainly Ahab minced nothing of the report of all those astonishing accidents; if but to salve up his own honour, in the death of those Baalites, he made the best of Elijah's merits; he told of his challenge, conflict, victory, of the fire that fell down from heaven, of the conviction of Israel, of the unavoidable execution of the prophets, of the prediction and fall of those happy showers, and lastly, of Elijah's officious attendance. Who would not have suspected that Jezebel should have said, It is no striving, no dallying with the Almighty? No reasonable creature can doubt, after so prodigious a decision; God hath won us to heaven, he must possess us; justly are our seducers perished; none but the God that can command fire and water shall be ours, there is no prophet but his. But she, contrarily, instead of relenting, rageth; and sends a message of death to Elijah. "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them, by to-morrow about this time." Neither

January 23. 1867. Hodie finivi cum omni a.
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scourges nor favours can work any thing with the obstinately wicked All evil hearts are not equally disaffected to good. Ahab and Jezebel were both bad enough, yet Ahab yields to that work of God, which Jezebel stubbornly opposeth: Ahab melts with that water, with that fire, wherewith Jezebel is hardened: Ahab was bashfully, Jezebel audaciously impious. The weaker sex is ever commonly stronger in passion, and more vehemently carried with the sway of their desires, whether to good or evil: she swears and stamps at that whereat she should have trembled; she swears by those gods of hers, which were not able to save their prophets, that she will kill the prophet of God, who had scorned her gods, and slain her prophets.

It is well that Jezebel could not keep counsel: her threat preserved him whom she had meant to kill. The wisdom and power of God could have found evasions for his prophet, in her greatest secrecy; but now, he needs no other means of rescue but her own lips. She is no less vain than the gods she swears by. In spite of her fury, and her oath, and her gods, *Elijah* shall live: at once shall she find herself frustrate and forsworn: she is now ready to bite her tongue, to eat her heart for anger, at the disappointment of her cruel vow. It were no living for godly men, if the hands of tyrants were allowed to be as bloody as their hearts. Men and devils are under the restraint of the Almighty; neither are their designs more lavish, than their executions short.

Holy Elijah flies for his life; we hear not of the command of God, but we would willingly presuppose it. So divine a prophet should do nothing without God: his heels were no new refuge; as no where safe within the ten tribes, he flies to Beersheba, in the territories of Judah; as not there safe from the machinations of Jezebel, he flies alone, one day's journey, into the wilderness; there he sits him down under a juniper tree, and, as weary of life, no less than of his way, wishes to rise no more: "It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." O strange and uncouth mutation! what is this we hear? Elijah fainting and giving up! that heroical spirit dejected and prostrate! He that durst say to Ahab's face, "It is thou and thy father's house that troubleth Israel;" he that could raise the dead, open and shut the heavens, fetch down both fire and water with his prayers; he that durst chide and contest with all Israel, that durst kill the four hundred and fifty Baalites with the sword, doth he shrink at the frowns and threats of a woman? doth he wish to be rid of this life, because he feared to lose it? Who can expect an undaunted constancy from flesh and blood, when Elijah fails! The strongest and holiest saint upon earth is subject to some qualms of fear and infirmity; to be always and unchangeably good, is proper only to the glorious spirits in heaven. Thus the wise and holy God will have his power perfected in our weakness. It is in vain for us, while we carry this flesh about us, to hope for so exact health, as not to be cast down sometimes with fits of spiritual distemper. It is no new thing for holy men to wish for death: who can either marvel at, or blame the desire of advantage? for the weary traveller to long for rest, the prisoner for liberty, the banished for home, it is so natural, that the contrary disposition were monstrous. The benefit of the change is a just motive to our appetition; but to call for death out of a satiety of life, out of an impatience of suffering, is a weakness unbeseeming a saint. It is not enough, O Elijah, God hath more work yet for thee; thy God hath more honoured thee than thy fathers, and thou shalt live to honour him.

Toil and sorrow have lulled the prophet asleep under this juniper-tree; that wholesome shade was well chosen for his repose: while death was called for, the cozen of death comes unbidden; the angel of God waits on him in that hard lodging. No wilderness is too solitary for the attendance of those blessed spirits. As he is guarded, so is he awaked by that messenger of God, and stirred up from his rest to his repast; while he slept his breakfast is made ready for him by those spiritual hands; "There was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruise of water at his head." O the never-ceasing care and providence of the Almighty, not to be barred by any place, by any condition! When means are wanting to us, when we are wanting to ourselves, when to God, even then doth he follow us with his mercy, and casts favour upon us, beyond, against expectation! What variety of purveyance doth he make for his servant! One while the ravens, then the Sareptan, now the angel shall be his caterer; none of them without a miracle: those other provided for him waking, this sleeping. O God! the eye of thy providence is not dimmer, the hand of thy power is not shorter; only teach thou us to serve thee, to trust thee.

Needs must the prophet eat, and drink, and sleep, with much comfort, while he saw that he had such a guardian, attendance, purveyor; and now the second time is he raised, by that happy touch, to his meal, and his way: "Arise, and eat, because the journey is too great for thee." What needed he to travel farther, since that divine power could as well protect him in the wilderness, as in Horeb? what needed he to eat, since he, that meant to sustain him forty days with one meal, might as well have sustained him without it? God is a most free agent, neither will he be tied to the terms of human regularities. It is enough that he knows and approves the reasons of his own choice and commands: once in forty days and nights shall Elijah eat, to teach us what God can do with little means; and but once, to teach us what he can do without means. Once shall the prophet eat—"Man lives by bread;" and but once—"Man lives not by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Moses, Elijah, our Saviour, fasted each of them forty days and forty nights: the three great fasters met gloriously in Tabor. I find not where God ever honoured any man for feasting. It is abstinence, not fulness, that makes a man capable of heavenly visions of divine glory.

The journey was not of itself so long; the prophet took those ways, those hours which his heart gave him. In the very same mount where Moses first saw God, shall Elijah see him: one and the same cave, as is very probable, was the receptacle to both. It could not but be a great confirmation of Elijah, to renew the sight of those sensible monuments of God's favour and protection, to his faithful predecessor. Moses came to see God in the bush of Horeb. God came to find Elijah in the cave of Horeb. What dost thou here, Elijah? The place was directed by a providence, not by a command. He is hid sure enough from

Jezebel; he cannot be hid from the all-seeing eye of God. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or, whither shall I fly from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the utmost part of the sea, even there shall thine hand find me, and thy right hand shall hold me." Twice hath God propounded the same question to Elijah: once in the heart, once in the mouth of the cave. Twice doth the prophet answer in the same words. Had the first answer satisfied, the question had not been re-demanded. Now, that sullen answer, which Elijah gave in the darkness of the cave, is challenged into the light, not without an awful preface. The Lord first passeth by him with the terrible demonstrations of his power. A great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake the rocks in pieces: that tearing blast was from God—God was not in it; so was he in it as in his other extraordinary works; not so in it, as by it to impart himself to Elijah: it was the usher, not the carriage of God. After the wind came an earthquake more fearful than it: that did but move the air, this the earth: that beat upon some prominences of earth, this shook it from the centre. After the earthquake came a fire more fearful than either. The other affected the ear, the feeling; but this lets in horror into the soul, by the eye, the quickest and most apprehensive of the senses. Elijah shall see God's mighty power in the earth, air, fire, before he hear him in the soft voice; all these are but boisterous harbingers of a meek and still word. In that God was! behold, in that gentle and mild breath there was omnipotency; there was but powerfulness in those fierce representations: there is not always the greatest efficacy, where is the greatest noise. God loves to make way for himself by terror, but he conveys himself to us in sweetness. It is happy for us, if, after the gusts and flashes of the law, we have heard the soft voice of evangelical mercy.

In this very mount, with the same horror, God had delivered his law to Moses and Israel. It is no marvel if Elijah wrapt his face in his mantle: his obedience draws him forth to the mouth of the cave, his fear still hides his head. Had there not been much courage in the prophet's faith, he had not stood out these affrightful forerunners of the divine presence, though with his face covered. The very angels do no less, before that all-glorious Majesty, than vail themselves with their wings. Far be it from us, once to think of that infinite and imnipotent Deity, without an humble awfulness.

Fear changes not the tenor of Elijah's answer: he hath not left one word behind him in the cave. "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away." I hear not a direct answer from the prophet to the demand of God; then he had said, I run away from the threats of Jezebel, and here I hide my head from her malicious pursuit. His guiltiness would not let him speak out all: he had rather say, "I have been more jealous for the Lord God of hosts," than I was fearful of Jezebel. We are all willing to make the best of our own case; but what he wants of his own accusation, he spends upon the complaint of Israel. Neither doth he more bemoan himself than exclaim against them, as apostates from God's covenant, violaters of his altars, murderers of his prophets. It must needs be a desperate condition of Israel, that drives Elijah to indict them before the throne of God. That tongue of his was used to plead for them, to sue for their pardon; it could not be but a forcible wickedness that makes it their accuser. Those idolatrous Israelites were well forward to reformation: the fire and rain from heaven, at the prayers of Elijah, had won them to a scorn of Baal: only the violence of Jezebel turned the stream, and now they are re-settled in impiety, and persecute him for an enemy, whom they almost adored for a benefactor, otherwise Elijah had not complained of what they had been. Who would think it? Jezebel can do more than Elijah. No miracle is so prevalent with the vulgar as the sway of authority, whether to good or evil.

Thou art deceived, O Elijah, thou art not left alone; neither is all Israel tainted. God hath children and prophets in Israel, though thou see them not; those clear eyes of the seer discern not the secret store of God; they looked not into Obadiah's caves, they looked not into the closets of the religious Israelites. He that sees the heart, can say, "I have left me seven thousand in Israel," all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him. According to the fashion of the wealthy, God pleaseth himself in hidden treasures; it is enough that his own eyes behold his riches. Never did he, never will he leave himself unfurnished with holy clients, in the midst of the foulest depravations of his church. The sight of his faithful ones hath sometimes been lost, never the being. Do your worst, O ye gates of hell, God will have his own. He, that could have more, will have some: that foundation is sure, "God knoweth who are his."

It was a true cordial for Elijah's solitariness, that he had seven thousand invisible abettors; neither is it a small comfort to our weakness, to have companions in good. For the wickedness of Israel God hath another receipt, the oil of royal and prophetic unction; Elijah must anoint Hazael king of Syria, Jehu king of Israel, Elisha for his successor. All these shall revenge the quarrels of God, and him; one shall begin, the other shall prosecute, the third shall perfect the vengeance upon Israel.

A prophet shall avenge the wrongs done to a prophet. Elisha is found, not in his study, but in the field; not with a book in his hand, but a plough. His father Shaphat was a rich farmer in Abel-meloha, himself was a good husbandman, trained up, not in the schools of the prophets, but in the thrifty trade of tillage; and, behold, this was the man whom God will pick out of all Israel for a prophet; God seeth not as man seeth; neither doth he choose men because they are fit, but therefore fits them, because he hath chosen them: his call is above all earthly institution.

I hear not of ought that Elijah said; only he casts his cloak upon Elisha in the passage: that mantle, that act was vocal. Together with this sign, God's instinct teacheth this amazed son of Shaphat, that he was designed to a higher work, to break up the fallow-ground of Israel by his prophetical function. He finds a strange virtue in that robe: and, as if his heart were changed with that habit, forgets his team, and runs after Elijah; and sues for the leave of a farewell to his parents, ere he had any but a dumb command to follow. The secret call of God offers an inward force to the heart, and insensibly draws us beyond the power of our resistance. Grace is no enemy to good nature: well may the respects to our earthly parents stand with our duties to our Father in heaven. I do not see Elisha wring his hands, and deplore his condition, that he shall leave the world and follow a prophet, but for the joy of that change he makes a feast; those oxen, those utensils of husbandry, whereon his former labours had been bestowed, shall now be gladly devoted to the celebration of that happy day, wherein he is honoured with so blessed an employment. If with desire, if with cheerfulness, we do not enter into the works of our heavenly Master, they are not like to prosper in our hands. He is not worthy of this spiritual station, who holds not the service of God his highest, his richest preferment.

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